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A stratified random sample of 69 6 workers in 361 households in Kern County, California, was selected to investigate the changes in labor use resulting from farm mechanization, and to explore the trend towards a stable labor force. Some major findings were: (1) Mechanization of the cotton harvest has erased the high peak of seasonal farm labor, (2) Management of labor recruitment can lead to the development of a dependable local labor force, (3) Much of the problem is due to migrant crews moving over the state and taking jobs away from local workers, (5) The seasonal work force is greatly under-utilized, (6) Underemployment is largely due to prejudices of workers against certain kinds of farm work, (7) A work program, including learning marketable skills would assist in meeting farm labor family needs. Some recommended activities useful in stabilizing local labor supply were: (1) increased activity by grower groups in recruiting and handling labor, (2) experimentation with crews trained to do all types of farm jobs, (3) development of new crops and varieties to smooth out the work year, and (4) in-migration of new workers willing to do all farm jobs. A related document in this series is available as VT 006 536. (DM)

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DIVISION OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Farm Mechanization and Labor Stabilization

Part II in a series on

Technological Change and
Farm Labor Use
Kern County, California, 1961

WILLIAM H. METZLER

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
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PREFACE

Mechanization and improved farm technology are leveling out the peaks of high seasonal labor use in Kern County. This trend is explored in the present report, and suggestions are made to expedite the change toward a stable local labor force.

This is the second report in the series Technological Change and Farm Labor Use, Kern County, California, being prepared by William H. Metzler of the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture and J. Edwin Faris of the Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics (Davis Campus).

The first report in the series, The Farm Worker in a Changing Agriculture, described the changing composition of the labor force, the decreased use of migratory labor, and the employment and earnings of the workers.

The forthcoming third report, Capital, Technology, and the Demand for Labor, will deal with the structure of labor use on farms at different levels of technology.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the other people who had a part in this research project. These include: Frank H. Maier of the Economic Research Service, USDA, and George Mehren, former director of the Giannini Foundation for assistance in initiating and planning it; J. Edwin Faris of the Giannini Foundation for his cooperation on the project at all stages; John Hoyt of the Agricultural Extension Service, Jerry Bolster of the Farm Placement Service, and Warren Wegis of the Farm Bureau, for their assistance and counsel in planning the field work in Kern County; Eric Thor and Samuel H. Logan of the Giannini Foundation, Dean E. McKee, Reuben Hecht, and Robert C. McElroy of the Economic Research Service, and William J. Haltigan for constructive suggestions and review of the manuscript.

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FARM MECHANIZATION AND LABOR STABILIZATION[1]

by

William H. Metzler[2]

INTRODUCTION

Cotton production has played a unique role in the economic development of California. It became important during the 1930's when drought, depression, and displacement were uprooting people in other parts of the nation. They flocked to California, and cotton became the major stepping stone in their entry into the economy of the state. They maintained themselves by seasonal farm employment, and in their annual pattern of work, cotton was a basic crop. It provided more work for them, 80 to 100 days of employment each year, and greater certainty of work than any other activity.

Although cotton is a relatively new crop in California, it has become one of the most important products of the state. Total production was 26,000 bales in 1921, 264,000 in 1930, 545,000 in 1940, 777,000 in 1950, and 1,939,000 in 1960.[3] The use of labor increased proportionately up to 1950. The State Employment Service estimated that 120,000 workers were employed at the peak of the cotton harvest in 1949 and that as many as 40,000 were used for spring hoeing and chopping. The annual wage bill in cotton production had risen to around $40,000,000.

The shift to machine harvesting was rapid and it cut deeply into labor needs. Only 13 percent of the cotton in the state was machine harvested in

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1/ This is the second report in a research project cooperative between the University of California and the United States Department of Agriculture in regard to capital-labor substitution in California. The first report, The Farm Worker in a Changing Agriculture, Kern County, 1961, presents the basic data in regard to the labor force in the county. The third report, Capital, Technology, and the Demand for Labor, by J. Edwin Faris, deals with on-farm changes in labor use. This report applies the findings of the project to the construction of a stable local labor force.

2/ Agricultural Economist, Farm Production Economics Division, Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, and Research Associate in the Experiment Station, University of California.

3/ Early data from History of Cotton in California, by California Planting Cotton Seed Distributors, Bakersfield, 1956. 1960 data from California State Crop Reporting Service.

1949; but in 1950, 34 percent was handled in this way; in 1951, 53 percent; and in 1952, 59 percent. At the present time more than 90 percent of the cotton crop in the state is harvested by machine and fewer than 20,000 workers do the entire job. Within the cotton area the high seasonal peak of labor needs has been erased, contributing to greater stability in the use of labor. Mechanization of cotton operations is also changing the seasonal labor situation over a large part of the state. Many workers in the deciduous fruit areas formerly obtained a major part of their annual employment in the cotton fields. With the elimination of this source of employment, they may no longer be able to maintain their position in the agricultural economy.

The cotton-fruit seasonal employment pattern in California was the source of many problems. The movement of workers to rumored areas of labor demand meant a shifting and unpredictable labor supply. Workers often moved to places where they had to wait for weeks for the crops to ripen. Growers often found that by the time a crop was ready to harvest, a surplus of labor had dwindled to a number inadequate to handle the job.1/

Efforts to eliminate this erratic and wasteful method of labor allocation have been only partially successful. A system of farm placement offices has provided more reliable direction to migratory workers. Yet ill-timed movements still cut into the efficiency of labor utilization. Workers find it necessary to move into other lines of employment in order to obtain economic security.2/

An evaporating labor supply has meant that a constant search has been needed to discover new sources of labor. The new workers have, in turn, left for other lines of employment. Mechanization of high labor-using operations is proving to be the most trouble-free method of reducing the irregularity and uncertainty which has characterized agricultural labor needs in California.

Even the mechanization of hay and grain operations could not have had as widespread an effect in California as that of the use of machine methods in cotton. Cotton, like alfalfa, has become a stabilizing force in farm employment and adds to the continuity of work for skilled regular employees, rather than serving to attract large numbers of seasonal workers. Cost and returns

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1/ For a comprehensive statement in regard to the farm labor problem in the state, see California's Farm Labor Problems, Part I, Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, Sacramento, 1961.

2/ Migratory Labor in American Agriculture, report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, Washington, D.C., 1951.

data, in regard to the crops in the area, indicate that cotton acreages are likely to increase as rapidly as production controls permit, so the stabilizing effect may increase. In the cotton counties the major obstacle to a stabilized local labor force will be the fruit, vegetable, and other hand-labor crops in the area.

The effect of cotton mechanization on the labor market in the deciduous fruit areas of the state is likely to be almost as far-reaching as in the cotton area itself. Many seasonal workers in those areas moved south in the fall to pick cotton, and may now have to move out of the market for farm labor. Farmers in those areas may have to rely on more recruitment of local "citizen" labor, or on special workers brought in to meet their peak season needs.

The future for Anglo workers in seasonal farm labor has become highly precarious.[1/] The work season for other crops in the state is comparatively short, except for lettuce, carrots, asparagus, citrus, and grapes; and work in these crops is performed largely by Spanish American, Mexican, and Filipino workers. Anglo workers may have to shift to work in those crops, or become highly migratory.

The effect of cotton mechanization will be felt by the economically distressed in other states. "Economic refugees" will still be able to find work in California during the summer months, but they will have difficulty in remaining through the year. California will not be the haven to displaced farmers and workers that it has been in the past. Such people are still coming into the state, however, especially from the South where they are being displaced by mechanization -- and by cotton mechanization in particular. Workers who formerly made an annual northward migration out of Texas are looking for both a new base of operation and for new work areas.

Purpose and Method

Survey activities in regard to the effects of mechanization were conducted in 1961 and were limited to Kern County. Mechanization has proceeded more rapidly there than in most cotton-producing areas. A randomized sample of farm

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1/ The workers have been classified as follows: Anglo-American or Anglo persons of European ancestry; Spanish American -- those of Mexican ancestry who were born in the United States or have been here for an extended period of time; Mexican -- those who entered the United States under Public Law 414 ("greencards"), and "others," Negroes, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans.

worker households was interviewed in regard to their employment, migration, earnings, and availability for work in other crops or jobs. This sample consisted of 696 workers in 361 households. Growers, public officials, and labor contractors were questioned in regard to farm labor trends in the county.

The present report is the second to be based on the results of this survey. It presents the changes in labor use in the county which have resulted from mechanization, and explores the trend toward a stable labor force. It discusses actions which could strengthen that trend.

Growers in California have discussed for many years the possibility of having local labor forces which could be utilized locally on a year-round or close to year-round basis. Migrant labor has involved many problems: expensive housing, meticulous sanitation and health precautions, frequent inspections, uncertain work performance, and on top of them, unfriendly criticism. Yet the seasonality of agriculture, and the local advantages and disadvantages in production seemed to preclude the possibility of a stabilized work force. Now such a work force is becoming possible in Kern County.

It appears that the elimination of high peaks of seasonal labor use may be developing a new agricultural economy in this county which is not based on mass seasonal employment. The extent to which a completely stable labor force is developed, however, is likely to depend both on the labor policies of growers and labor contractors, and on the attitudes of the farm workers.

A similar possibility for labor stabilization is likely to develop in other cotton areas in the United States. Each area will constitute a somewhat different situation depending both on the presence and structure of other seasonal operations, and on the policies of the farm operators.

GROWTH OF A LABOR SUPPLY AND A SYSTEM OF LABOR USE

Early California agriculture was largely general farming. Farmers grew hay and grain which they either sold or fed to livestock.[1/] Farm workers were usually single men, some of whom moved widely while others settled down and became part of a ranch organization. Irrigation farming, however, began to expand in the fertile valley areas and this started a trend toward intensive, commercial agriculture, the production of high yield-high return crops.

1/ California Agriculture, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1946.

Since then, California agriculture has developed according to a pattern of local specialization in those commercial crops best suited to the soils, climate, and marketing facilities of the immediate area. Early attempts at diversification were put aside because farmers could make a higher return by increasing their production of the crops best adapted to local conditions. Specialization resulted in the piling up of local labor demands, particularly for the harvest. Workers, too, tended to specialize and to move from area to area in order to stay with the operations which they knew best, or which provided them with the highest daily return.

The pattern of labor use typical of California was formed as growers in specially favored areas increased their plantings of grapes, peaches, lettuce, or other commercial crops.[1/] High seasonality of labor use, migration from harvest to harvest, and unemployment during the slack season, became an established part of the agricultural economy in California. It was visualized that the labor supply would be made up of single Filipinos and Mexicans who were highly mobile, and who were satisfied to do routine, monotonous labor.[2/]

Cotton was added to these specialty crops in the early part of the present century. By 1925 the acala variety of cotton had been perfected and was adopted as the only legal variety that could be produced in the state. The high productivity and long staple length of this breed of cotton firmly established the cotton industry in the agriculture of the state. Cotton attracted a different type of worker than either the early hay, grain, and livestock enterprises, or the more recent vegetable and fruit operations.

Growth of the Labor Supply

Prior to the 1930s, there was a large floating population in Kern County.[3/] This was composed largely of single men; although Mexican workers were bringing in their families. These migrants performed most of the seasonal farm labor. The Mexicans worked in the fruit and vegetables, the Negroes in the cotton, and the Filipinos in the vineyards. Most of the Mexicans had come into the state

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1/ Adams, R. L., and T. R. Kelly, A Study of Farm Labor in California, Berkeley: University of California, Calif. Agr. Expt. Sta. Cir. No. 193, 1918.

2/ Adams, R. L., Common Labor Needs of California Crops, Berkeley: University of California, Calif. Agr. Expt. Sta. Mimeo., 1918.

3/ Transients in California, State Relief Administration, Sacramento, California, 1936.

during and after World War I. Many of the Negroes had been brought in from the South to work in the cotton, but they tended to shift into other types of employment.

The movement of Anglo workers into the county was unimportant until the depression, displacement, and droughts of the thirties. It began in the early part of the decade and reached a peak around 1935, 1936, and 1937. The first systematic study of labor use in the state was made by the State Relief Administration officials in 1935.[1/] They tried to assess the possibilities of providing employment for all the refugees who had entered the state. Their figures in regard to crops, acreages, and resident and nonresident workers in Kern County were as follows:

Crop	Acres	Workers at peak	Percentage of workers resident	nonresident
Cotton	50,000	5,500	25	75
Potatoes	8,900	3,000	30	70
Grapes	17,056	7,200	25	75
Citrus	1,463	634	17	83
Deciduous fruits	6,214	4,644	25	75
Melons	1,009	495	75	25
Onions	1,065	1,260	75	25

In only two minor crops, melons and onions, were a majority of the workers from local sources. In the major crops, three-fourths of the workers came from outside the county.

The movement of Anglo-American drought refugees into the area was so rapid that no housing or other accommodations were available for them. Both farmers and federal authorities constructed camps so that the homeless families could move off the ditchbanks. The newcomers began to construct settlements of their own, and gradually a resident farm labor supply had settled in Kern and also in several other counties in the San Joaquin Valley area.

Most of the newcomers had little experience as hired farm workers, but they usually knew how to pick cotton or fruit. They moved over the area according to their knowledge of the various harvests. Migrants from the cotton

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1/ Survey of Agricultural Labor Requirements in California, State Relief Administration, Sacramento, California, 1935.

states tended to gravitate to the cotton areas. Most of the workers moved north to the fruit harvests during the summer months, and some moved into the cotton fields in Arizona during the winter. Farm operators still experienced shortages of labor in spite of the surplus of people who were milling over the state. Worker movements were guided by rumor rather than by informed timing.

Workers moved into and out of Kern County roughly in accordance with seasonal needs. The timing of these movements still existed a few years ago -- one movement into the county at the time of cotton chopping and potato picking in April, May, and June, a second for the grape harvest in July and August, and a third in September and October for the cotton harvest (Table 1). The major movement out of the county occurred in July when the workers moved north to work in the apricots, pears, peaches, and other fruit crops.

Specialization of workers in those tasks with which they were more familiar fashioned their annual work pattern. Avoidance of types of work handled by "stoop" laborers also became an accepted part of the Anglo workers' employment pattern. Most of the work in vegetables was in the "stoop-labor" category, but not that in cotton nor in potatoes. Many of these work taboos were in existence before the Anglos came. They adopted some and rejected others according to their own work traditions.

Kern County, A Home Base Area

Kern County became the "home base" for many workers over the state. In 1940 it was estimated that two-thirds of the seasonal labor in the county was being performed by resident workers.[1/] It was also reported that the majority of the available workers were unemployed. World War II rapidly changed this employment picture and the surplus labor disappeared into the shipyards, defense plants, and the armed forces. Since then the migration of Anglo and Spanish American workers into the county has continued. An exodus from the county to nonfarm employment has also occurred as economic conditions became favorable for it.

In one respect Kern County has been particularly fortunate. It is at the extreme south end of the Central Valley area in California and has the advantages

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1/ Adams, R. L., Agricultural Labor Requirements and Supply, Kern County, Berkeley: University of California, Calif. Agr. Expt. Sta., Giannini Found. Mimeo. Report No. 70, 1940. Note that these "resident" workers were probably the same ones that were regarded as "nonresident" in 1935.

TABLE 1

Month-by-Month Requirements for Agricultural Workers, Kern County, 1935[a/]

Month	Agricultural workers required								
				In cotton		In potatoes		In grapes	
	Total	Resident	Non-resident	Resident	Non-resident	Resident	Non-resident	Resident	Non-resident
	number								
January	1,769	1,051	718	--	--	--	--	--	--
February	25	25	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
March	25	25	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
April	1,250	823	427	--	--	--	--	--	--
May	5,130	3,018	2,112	245	735	900	600	--	--
June	10,509	4,875	5,634	245	535	900	2,100	--	--
July	15,069	6,430	8,639	--	--	900	100	1,800	4,200
August	11,495	5,359	6,136	--	--	350	--	1,800	5,400
September	9,450	5,013	4,437	1,375	625	--	--	1,800	3,200
October	13,175	5,048	8,127	1,375	4,125	--	--	1,800	3,200
November	7,634	2,981	4,653	1,375	4,125	--	--	1,500	--
December	4,634	2,981	1,653	1,375	1,125	--	--	1,500	--

a/ Data from Survey of Agricultural Labor Requirements in California, 1935, State Relief Administration of California, Sacramento, 1935.

of a warmer climate and a longer growing season. For farm workers this has meant (1) a somewhat longer work year, and (2) a desirable place to spend the winter. They built homes in the county and gave it a relatively large local labor force. The workers were largely in family groups -- cotton was conducive to family labor -- and settled in single family dwellings. They supplanted the itinerant "bindle stiffs" who had been the major element in the seasonal work force in the area.

A "home base" county incurs some additonal financial responsibilities. In years of slack work opportunities over the area, this has meant an added welfare load in the county. Yet this expense is partially defrayed by the State and Federal Governments. The local labor force has meant additional problems, yet growers in Kern County have had greater assurance of a labor supply than farm operators in many parts of the state.

Seasonal Unemployment

The 1935 estimates of labor requirements in the county pointed to a slack period of labor use in February and March. Only 25 hired farm workers were needed in the county during those months. That situation has been improved only slightly. Labor use in seasonal operations in the county in 1950 varied from a peak of 20,000 workers in November to a low of 580 workers during the third week of March. In 1961 the peak was 14,450 workers in June and a low of 800 workers in March[1/] (Figure 1). Agricultural, civic, and other groups in the county have devoted a good deal of time to studying how new activities might be introduced to afford employment during the slack spring months. Their lack of success so far is evidenced by the fact that several thousand families still have to resort to public assistance grants in order to get through the slack season of the year.

Economic Problems of the Migrant Labor System

Specialization in the most profitable crops leads to a highly efficient production structure. Growers become expert in their specialty and obtain or design the most efficient equipment and methods. Processing and marketing agencies develop around these specialties and move them into the market in their most acceptable form.

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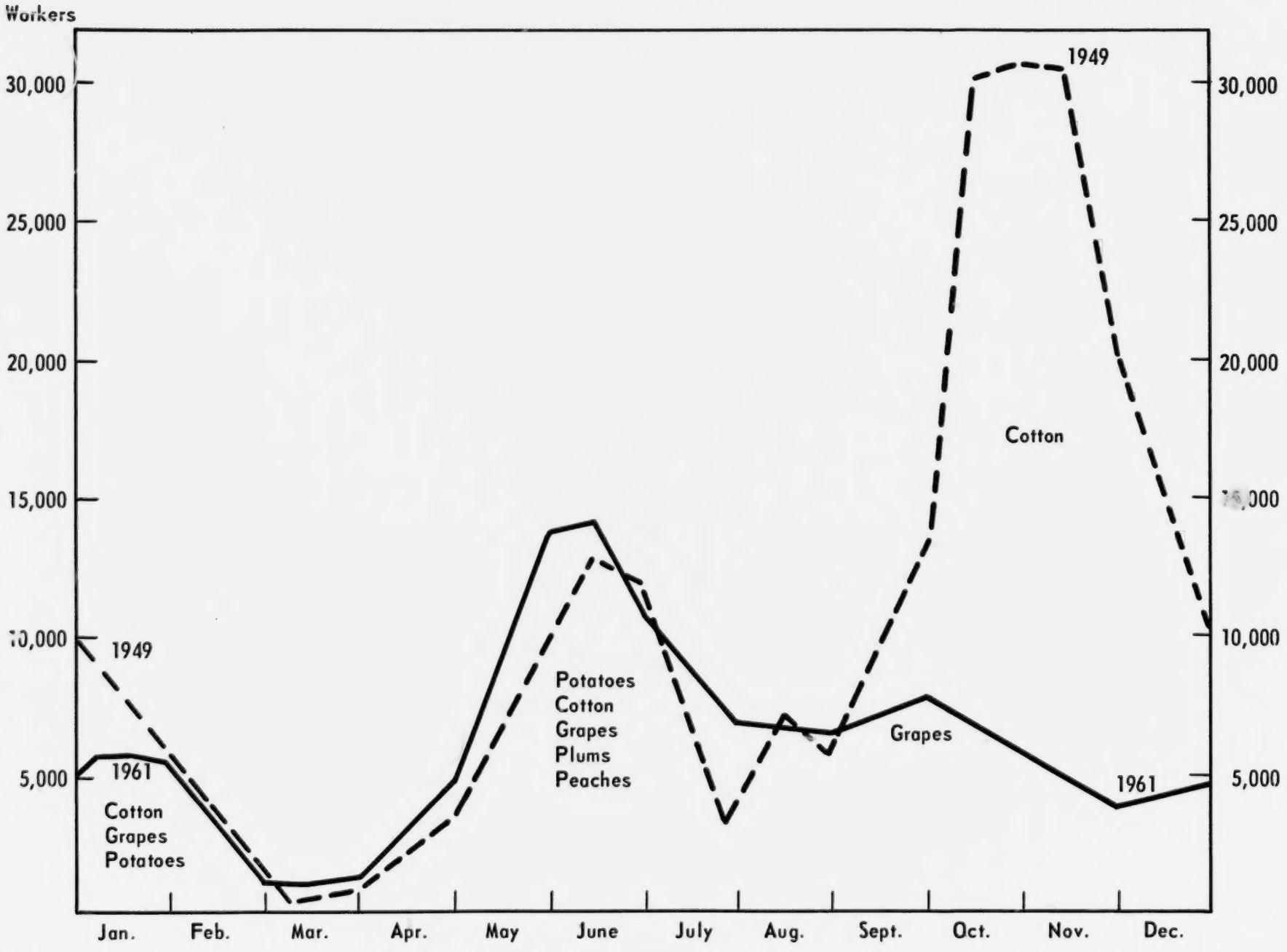
1/ Data from State Department of Employment. Figures include total labor use in seasonal farm operations, both family and hired.

FIGURE 1. SEASONAL FARM LABOR NEEDS
Kern County – 1949 and 1961



Estimates by California State Employment Service.

Yet this efficiency is not a complete gain. First, greater production is likely t. accompanied by a decline in price, in which case the fruits of increased efficiency may go to someone else.[1/] Second, specialization results in whatever seasonal fluctuations in labor demand that the selected crops will dictate. An ample and fluid supply of labor is essential for such a system to operate, and this may involve serious economic costs for the community. Under this system seasonal workers, (1) have little purchasing power to add to the local economy; (2) build neighborhoods which are below acceptable standards; (3) become a burden on welfare, educational, and other agencies; and (4) move out of seasonal labor as soon as they are able and leave the growers to look for another labor supply.[2/] Mechanization is affording the growers of Kern County an opportunity to reduce these costs and to build a more effecient community.

MECHANIZATION TRANSFORMS THE PATTERN OF LABOR USE

If the cotton in Kern County were still picked by hand, close to 50,000 workers would be needed at the peak of the harvest season. Movement of seasonal workers into the county would be a major problem for farmers, housing authorities, sanitarians, and welfare workers. Since 1949, however, the demand for hand labor has decreased year after year. According to estimates of officials at the Farm Labor Office in Bakersfield, the peak number of workers used during the harvest declined from 30,000 in 1949 to 6,000 in 1961 (Figure 2). During this period the acreage in cotton has been reduced by crop control programs, but has moved up again whenever controls have been relaxed -- 247,000 acres in 1947, 318,000 in 1953, and 197,000 in 1961. Production has shifted to some extent with acreages, but has gradually moved upward because of improved production practices, from 365,000 bales in 1947 to 500,000 in 1961 (Figure 3).

Cotton mechanization has progressively curtailed the work year for seasonal employees. Formerly, the cotton harvest often lasted into February or March and there was only an 8- to 10-week slack period between the harvest for one year and the hoeing and weeding for the next. By 1961, 6,000 workers were used during one early week of the harvest and only 4,000 thereafter. By December 30, the number employed had dwindled to 700. With complete mechanization of

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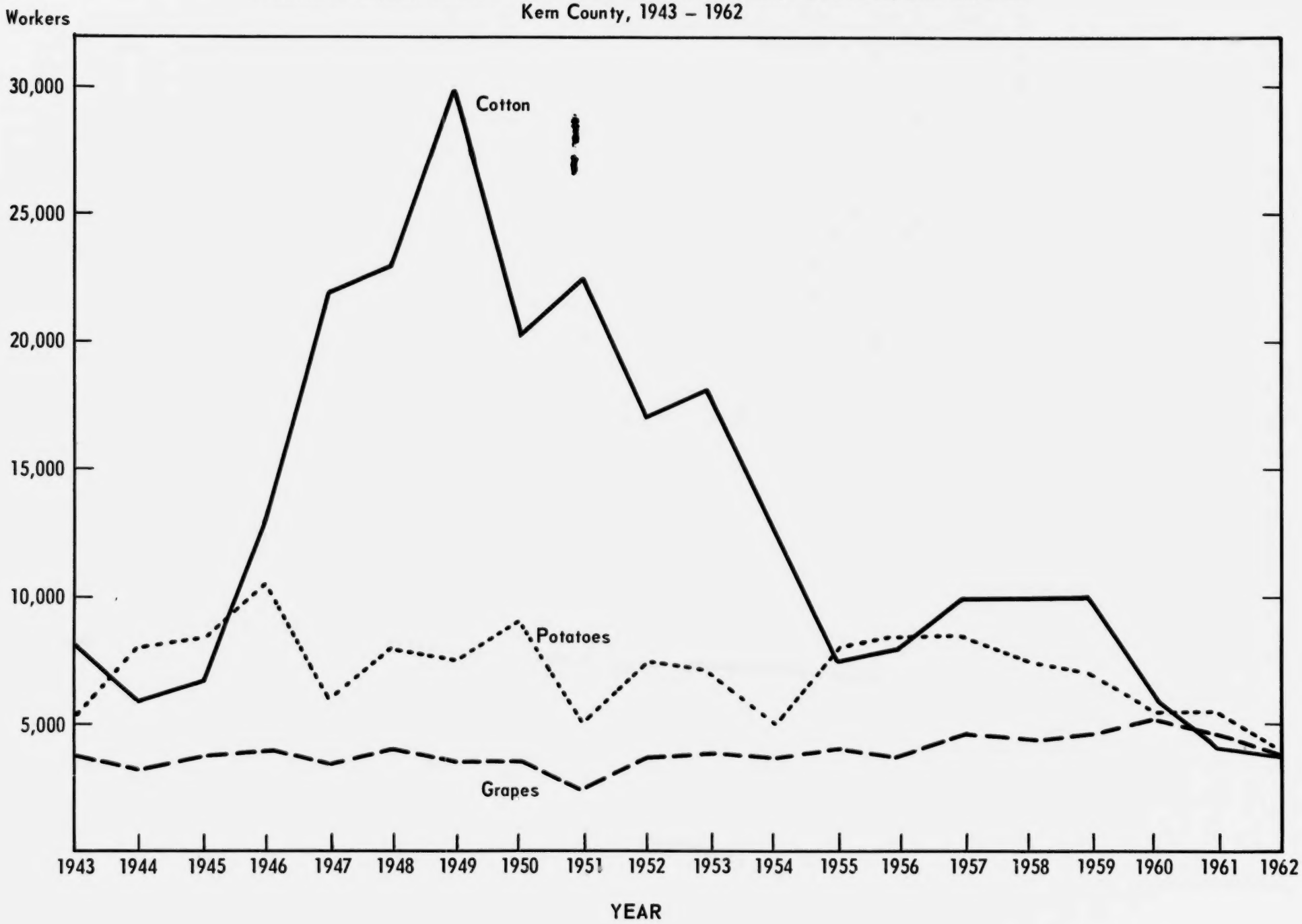
1/ California's Farm Labor Problems, Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, Sacramento, 1961, pp. 33-46, 162-177.

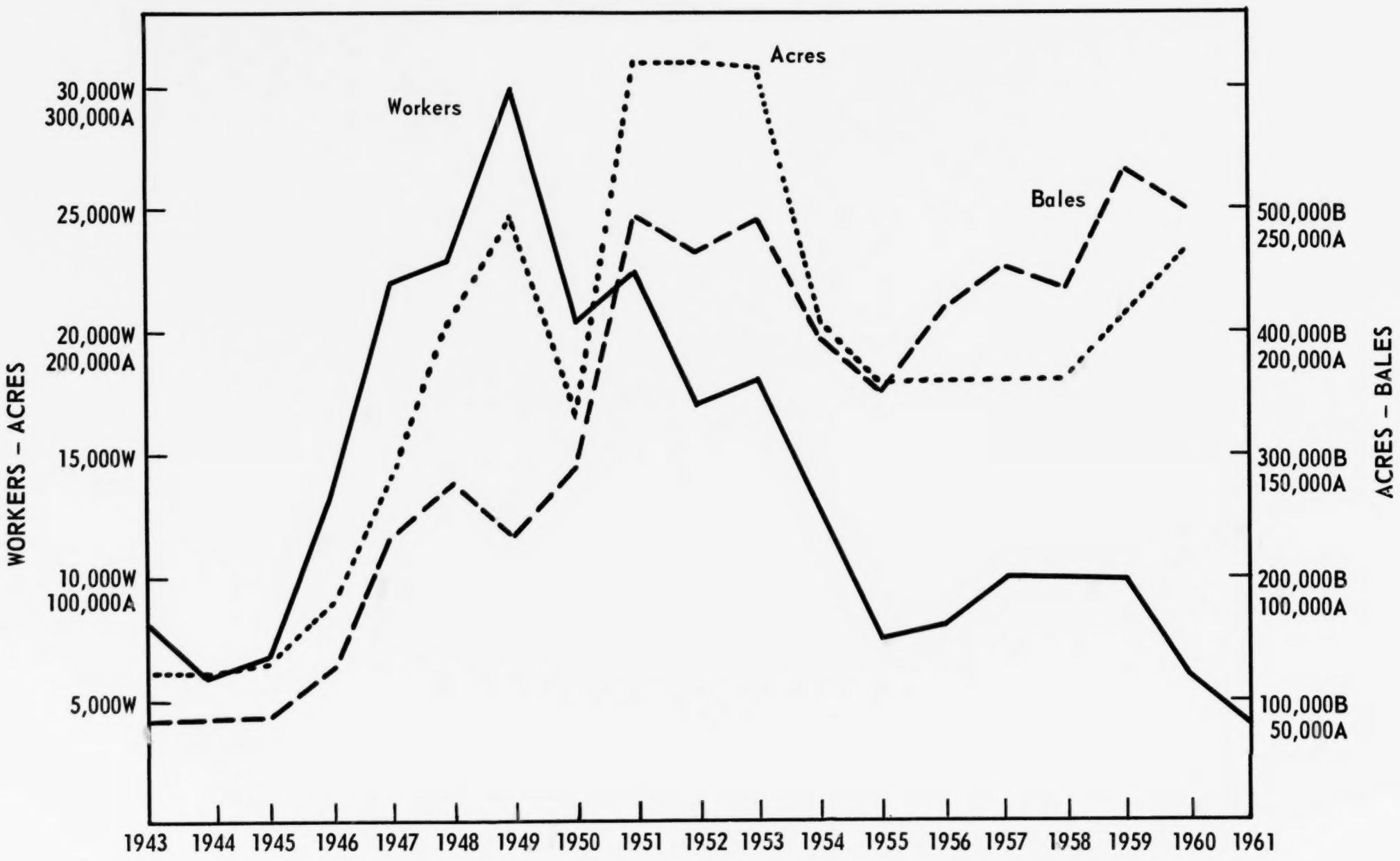
2/ Migratory Labor in American Agriculture, report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, Washington, D.C., 1951, pp. 16-24.

FIGURE 2. LABOR USE AT PEAK OF SEASON IN COTTON, POTATOES, AND GRAPES
Kern County, 1943 – 1962



Estimates by California State Employment Service.

FIGURE 3. COTTON ACREAGE, PRODUCTION, AND PEAK USE OF LABOR
Kern County, 1943 – 1961



Data on acreage and bales from U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.
Estimates on workers from California State Employment Service.

the cotton harvest, the period of heavy seasonal labor use will end in September or early October with the harvesting of the grapes. For workers who do not pick grapes, the period of seasonal work will extend from May 1 to July 1.

Mechanization of the cotton harvest, on the other hand, will necessarily raise the skill level and the economic status of regular farm workers. The cotton harvesters are a complex mechanism calling for more skillful handling than many types of farm equipment. They also represent an investment of from $10,000 to $20,000, depending on the capacity of the machine. Cotton growers permit only experienced operators to handle them. A highly selected work force, then, will be taking the place of an unselected group of individuals who flocked to the cotton country each year in order to make enough money to tide them through the winter.

The New Peak in Seasonal Employment (Figure 4)

A secondary peak in seasonal labor use has also been an established part of the farm economy in Kern County. This occurs in May and June when a peak need for around 15,000 workers has been built from the following major sources:

Potato picking	3,500 - 5,500 workers
Cotton chopping	3,500 - 4,000 workers
Grape girdling	3,500 - 5,000 workers
Plum picking	1,800 - 2,300 workers
Peach picking	700 - 1,000 workers

Mechanization of the cotton harvest has left this as the only high period of labor use during the year. It provides only 25 to 40 days of employment for most of the workers who participate in it, hence, it makes migration a necessity. Local workers who depend on it have to go elsewhere in order to get adequate employment. Outside workers will be attracted to it but will also need to move to other employment. Fortunately, mechanization and other technological developments are likely to dissipate this remaining peak within a few years.

Erasing the New Peak: Potatoes

The future of potatoes in the local economy is unclear. Prices, plantings, and yields are highly uncertain.[1/] Increased production of potatoes elsewhere,

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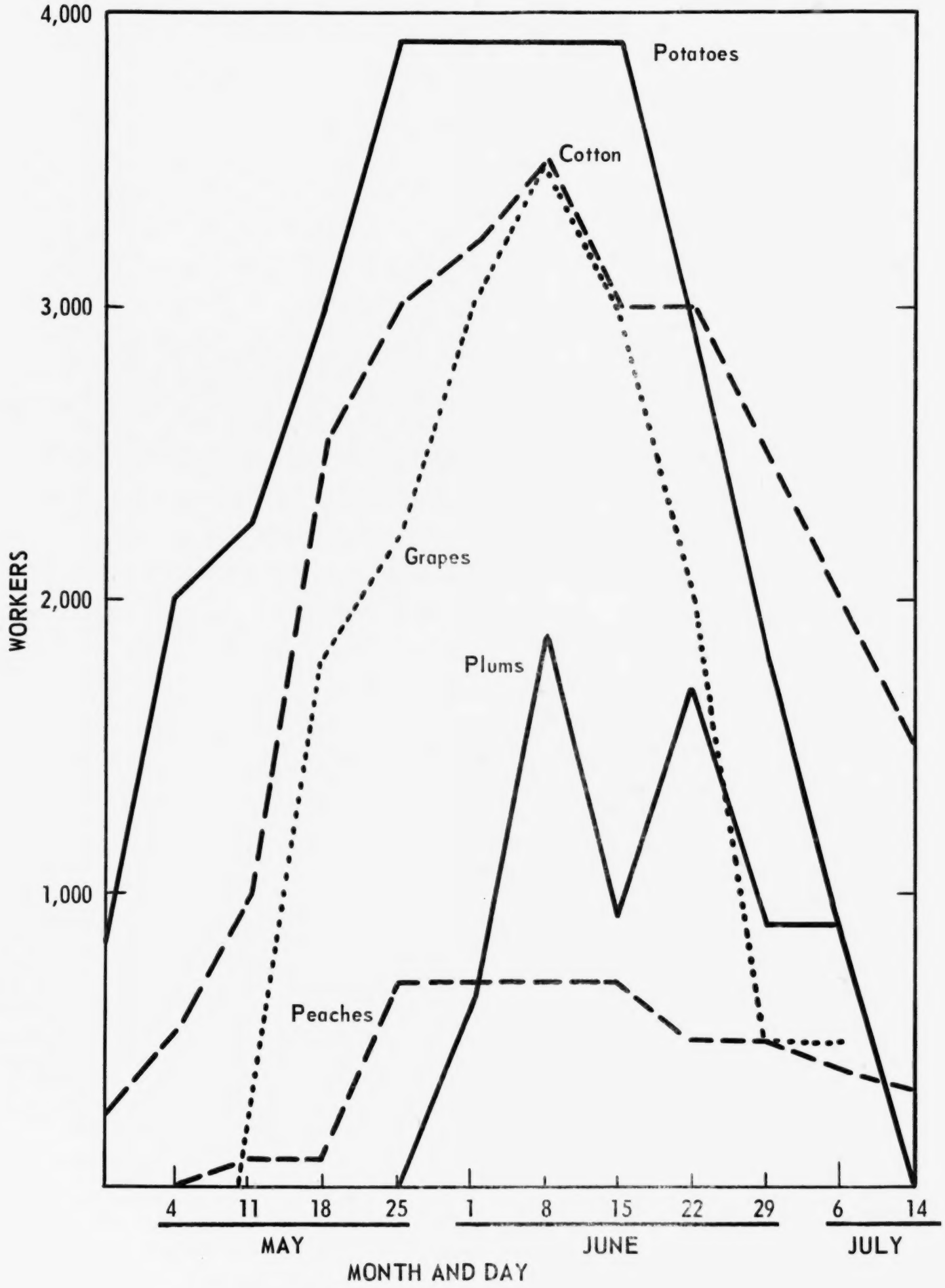
1/ Pusateri, Francis P., "Efficient Marketing for Profit," Potato Manual, Potato Growers Association, Bakersfield, 1961.

FIGURE 4. MAJOR CROPS INVOLVED IN PRESENT LABOR PEAK
Kern County, 1962



Estimates by California State Employment Service.

plus a shift of consumer demand away from high quality market potatoes to potatoes in processed form -- potato chips, frozen mashed potatoes, and french fries -- now provide Kern County potatoes with severe competition for a market. Uncertain markets and an uncertain future also mean irregular and minimal use of potato labor.

Potato growers find it necessary to cut costs, and mechanization of harvest operations offers the chief opportunity. The use of machines has been delayed in some parts of the county by adverse soil conditions, but this problem is being overcome, and within a few years all potatoes will be dug, picked, and loaded by machine. Both the work on the potato machines and in the packing sheds will still call for some hand labor, but not enough to create a need for workers from outside the county.

Cotton Chopping

Some of the more progressive growers in Kern County have already shifted to machine use for hoeing and weeding cotton. They forecast that as soon as precision planting is perfected, chopping and hoeing cotton by hand will disappear. Efficient cotton-chopping machines already exist, but they can be quite destructive if the cotton plants do not occur in a regular order. Mechanization of cotton chopping has also lagged because the same work force was used for both the chopping and the harvest. Now that these workers are no longer needed for harvesting operations, mechanization of chopping and weeding will proceed more rapidly.

This will constitute the second major cut in the May-June peak. A third can be expected to occur in the grapes.

Grapes

The acreage in grapes has increased from around 19,000 in 1946 to 27,000 at the present time and the acreage is still rising. There also has been a slight upward trend in employment, but annual yields and labor needs have fluctuated within a rather narrow range depending on growing conditions.

Three types of experimentation are underway in relation to labor-using operations in grapes. Most important of these for the present discussion is the use of gibberellin as a growth stimulant.[1/] Grape growers have their vines

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1/ Weaver, Robert J., Plant Regulators and Grape Production, Berkeley: University of California, Calif. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bul. No. 752, 1956.

girdled annually in order to increase yields. Early experiments with gibberellin indicates that it produces the same effect as vine girdling with far less outlay for labor. This method could spread very rapidly and materially reduce the number of workers needed for grape operations in May and June.

A machine has been developed to harvest raisin grapes. It picks the bunches from the vine and transports them to a paper tray which is unrolled from the side of the machine.[1/] This is still in the experimental stage, but its use could spread rapidly if labor supplies become short or a threat of labor disturbance develops. A vine-pruning machine is also being developed which works well when the vines are properly trained over trellises.

How rapidly these machines will be adopted remains to be seen. A number of years may be required to develop a vine structure satisfactory for their efficient use. Even more important, many grape growers in the county take pride in their proficiency in the existing methods of grape production. They are not eager to switch to new methods. If labor costs should rise significantly, however, a shift to machine methods is likely to follow.

Other Crops and Operations

The demand for plum and peach pickers is not likely to change rapidly in the near future. Plantings of plum and peach trees have increased and are likely to overcome savings in labor because of better tree size, more efficient ladders, and better hauling and packing methods. Yet labor use in these operations has never been great enough to constitute a serious problem. Insofar as a small seasonal peak in labor use does remain, it will be no greater than that at the height of the grape harvest. Plum producers may have to be careful in regard to future plantings, however, because harvest needs for that crop call for a relatively large number of workers for a very short season. As the local labor supply dwindles they may find it increasingly difficult to find workers to harvest their crop.

Resultant Pattern of Labor Use

Present trends indicate a gradual reduction in the present May-June peak to around 7,000 workers, or about the same number that will be needed during the

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1/ Lamouria, L. H., et al., "Grape Mechanical Harvesting Comes Closer to Reality," California Agriculture, June 1962.

other seasons of the year. Little or no migration of labor will then be needed to handle the seasonal operations that occur at that time of year. Migration to work in the potato sheds and at potato hauling, however, is so firmly fixed that it is likely to continue unless there is preferential hiring of local people.

Both the spring and the fall will become periods of heavy use of specialized farm equipment. Hauling cotton and potatoes will continue to call for about the same number of semiskilled workers. Some additional general farm workers may be needed, but the major change can be toward more carefully planned utilization of those already being employed. The skill level of workers on some farms will be improved as more intricate equipment is added.

The change from mass employment to that of hiring individual workers according to their skill will mean that individual ability and personal relationships will become more significant factors in farm management. Under many types of hand labor these had been unimportant. In picking cotton, many workers merely filled their sacks and received a piece of scrip at the weighing stand. The farm operator had no idea how many workers were in the field nor whether they had asked for a job at the time they started to work. What kind of workers they were or where they came from made little difference so long as they continued to bring sacks of cotton to the weighing stand. Machine operators, however, are individuals with definite skills. In fact, many urban factory and office workers are less skilled and have more routine duties.

THE PRESENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

The agricultural employment situation in Kern County has changed much more radically than most local people have realized. Many people still retain the idea that the residents of East Bakersfield, Lamont, Arvin, Shafter, and similar cities are farm workers. The canvass of East Bakersfield in 1961 indicated that only one out of six of the families there still engaged in farm work. The results were similar in all other towns except Delano and McFarland. These towns are in the grape area, and employment in grape operations has been relatively stable. Many farm workers have left the other towns, and their houses have been taken over by nonfarm families; others have been able to move into nonfarm employment. Those who are still in seasonal farm work are underemployed and accept welfare assistance during the winter as the equivalent of the unemployment insurance received by their nonfarm neighbors.

Many of the displaced seasonal workers in these areas appear to be stalemated. They complain of a lack of local job opportunities and claim that growers are trying to keep industrial plants out of the area. But they overlook a very important consideration -- most of the workers lack marketable skills. Some are old or have only a limited range of nonfarm experience. Some have done nothing but unskilled farm work, others have moved about so much that they have built up a work record which qualifies them only for casual jobs. Most of those with good prospects for other work are already in it.[1/]

Fewer Hired Farm Workers

According to the U.S. Census of Population, there were 14,285 hired farm workers in Kern County in April 1950, and only 12,215 as of the same date in 1960 -- a decrease of 14.5 percent.[2/] The census figures were totaled from answers to a question in regard to the occupation of the people in each household. Neither figure includes all the workers who did some farm work in the county during the year. The number who worked in the county during the year, but who were not there in April at the time of the census enumeration is difficult to estimate. Employment Service figures indicate that it probably ran around 4,000 to 5,000 in 1960 and three times that number in 1950.

Increase in Regular Farm Workers

The Census of Agriculture reported 5,157 regular hired workers in Kern County in 1949 and 6,225 in 1959, a gain of 1,068, or 20.7 percent. This does not necessarily mean an increase in the number of machine operators. The census includes all workers who worked for the same employer for 150 days or more during the year as regular farm workers. The figures then indicate a 20 percent increase in the number of workers who had employment for 150 days or longer on the same farm.

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1/ See Metzler, William H., The Farm Worker in a Changing Agriculture, Part I in a series on technological change and farm labor use in Kern County, Calif., 1961, Berkeley: University of California, Agr. Expt. Sta., Giannini Found. Res. Rept. No. 277, Sept. 1964, 98 pp.

2/ Any comparison of number of farm workers during April is highly tenuous. Migration into the county is heaviest in April but begins in March. The time of their arrival varies from year to year. Hence, it is impossible to estimate how many of the workers enumerated in the census were local and how many were migrants.

It should be pointed out that the increase in number of long-term farm workers occurred in spite of the fact that, because of mechanization, fewer workers could have both chopped and picked cotton on the same farm in 1959. Under hand-labor methods, a worker could easily have had from 50 to 60 days at chopping and hoeing and 90 to 100 days of boll picking on the same farm. Now the over 150-day group will still include some hand workers in grapes, but will include very few in seasonal cotton operations.

Changes in Migrancy

Out of 361 farm labor families covered in the 1961 survey, 214 or 59 percent lived and worked only in Kern County.[1/] Those who migrated can be divided into two major groups: first, those with homes elsewhere who moved in either to do seasonal farm work or to stay, and second, Kern County residents who left the county to work elsewhere (Figure 5). Inmigrants were largely in family groups who came in to do seasonal labor in potatoes, cotton, and grapes (Table 2). Inmigrants were also numerous among general workers in grapes. Much of the outward movement was by family heads who left their families at home and engaged in short-term farm work, or work in processing plants.

Survey data indicated that migration to potato, cotton, or seasonal grape operations ordinarily were family movements. Movement to general farm or processing jobs was more often that of singles or of family heads. It is family movement, therefore, that is being reduced by mechanization of the cotton harvest. Mechanization of potato picking and cotton chopping will reduce it much more. The fact that almost two-thirds of the jobs held by migrant families in 1961 were still in potatoes or cotton indicates the extent to which further mechanization may curtail migration into the county.

Migration of potato workers is so firmly established that mechanization of the field operations may not automatically terminate it. Both shed workers and hauling workers tended to be mobile. Such workers probably will continue to migrate even though they leave part of their families at home (Figure 6).

Composition of the Work Force

According to the 1961 sample, approximately 30 percent of the farm work force now are general farm workers, 70 percent are seasonal. Yet the total

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1/ Much of the factual data for the present report were derived from this survey. See The Farm Worker in a Changing Agriculture, Kern County, 1961, for detailed data in regard to the work force in Kern County.

FIGURE 5. HIRED AGRICULTURAL WORK FORCE
Kern County, 1961

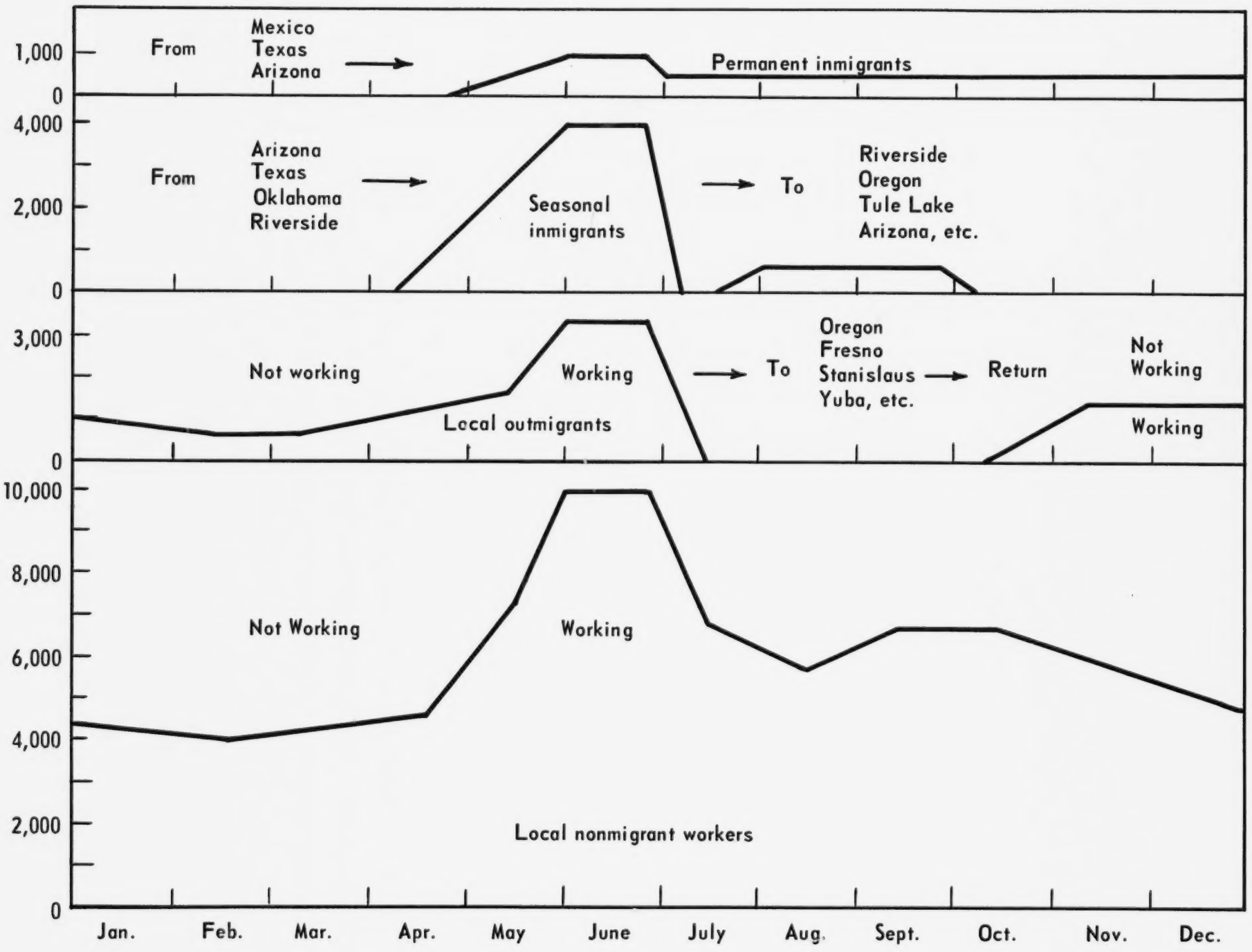


TABLE 2

Work of Migrants with and without Families, (a) Who Came to Kern County to Work, and (b) Who Left it to Work, 1961 Sample

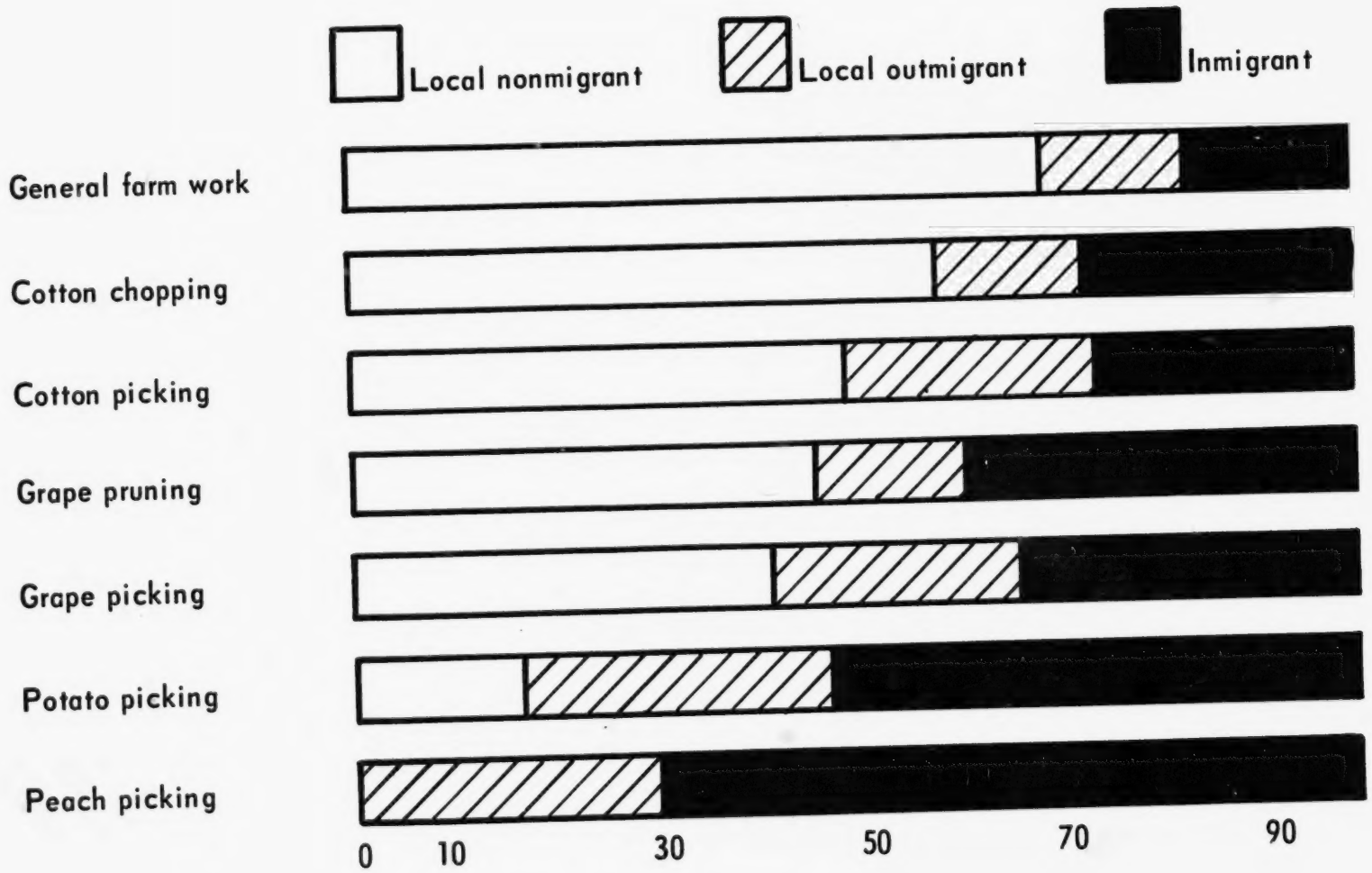
Operation or crop	Workers who came in		Workers who left	
	As individuals	In families	As individuals	In families
Total workers reporting	30	173[a]	38	82[b]
General farm work	2[c]	66	14	5
General farm work, grapes	12	12	--	--
Processing	1	6	7	4
Nonfarm work	--	2	6	1
Seasonal farm work				
Potatoes	5	86	2	14
Grapes	4	27	3	22
Cotton chopping	6	44	--	--
Cotton picking	2	6	2	9
Peas	--	11	--	--
Beans	--	--	--	8
Onions	--	9	--	--
Peaches	1	3	1	7
Plums	1	6	1	2
Prunes	--	--	--	14
Sugar beets	--	6	1	--
Other fruit	--	2	2	9
Other vegetables	--	2	5	1

a/ Total workers who came in family groups. Four did not work in Kern County.

b/ Total workers who left in family groups. Eight did not work outside the county.

c/ Figures indicate jobs so do not add to the number of workers. Some small jobs have been omitted.

FIGURE 6. MIGRANCY OF WORKERS IN SELECTED OPERATIONS,
Kern County, 1961



Data from 1961 survey.

man-hours worked by the general farm workers exceeded that of the seasonal by 31 percent.

Among seasonal workers, one-third are heads of families, two-thirds are wives or youths. Heads of households have been moving into other types of employment. Women and children have also moved out of the farm labor market, but have done so slowly, and now constitute the major element in the seasonal labor supply.

The employment of some general farm workers still is highly seasonal. These workers tend to be specialized in one or a few types of work and may migrate in order to stay with their speciality, e.g., hauling potatoes, operating a cotton-picking machine, work on a potato bulker. Usually, they have acquired a preferential status in their line of employment and regard themselves as experts. Some workers shift between specialized general farm work and seasonal employment in packing sheds or cotton gins. These short-term specialists are almost as numerous as the year-round general farm workers.

As between ethnic groups, slightly under half of all the farm workers are Anglo-American, almost 40 percent are Spanish American or Mexican, and the balance are Negroes, Filipinos, or of other ethnic groups. Spanish Americans and Mexicans are becoming more numerous in the labor force while the number of members of all other groups is declining (Figure 7).

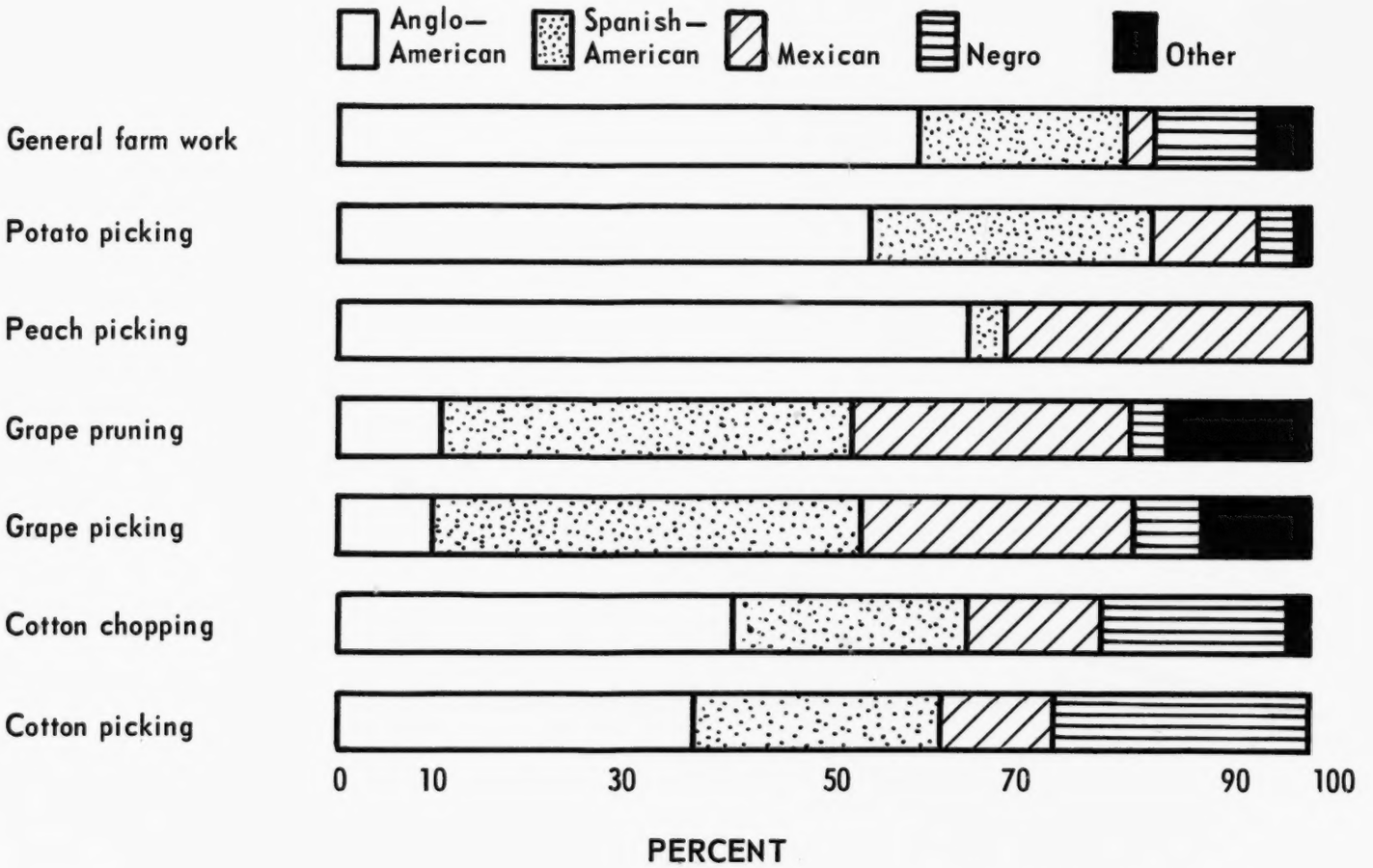
The composition of the seasonal farm work force is somewhat different. Forty percent of them were Anglos, 45 percent were Spanish American or Mexican, and the other 15 percent were from other ethnic groups.

Two changes are especially significant relative to achieving greater stability in the work force. First, the number of Mexican workers is increasing rapidly and they tend to settle in one place and do farm work of any type that is available. They tend to be a stabilizing force. Second, recent legislation in regard to wages and working conditions of women and youth is beginning to reduce the number of workers of this type. Since most of them are strictly seasonal workers, their departure tends to coincide with the decreased demand for such workers.

Employment and Earnings

During the 12 months previous to the survey, the workers in the sample were employed for an average of 140 days, that is, for approximately half of the working

FIGURE 7. ETHNIC ORIGIN OF WORKERS IN SELECTED OPERATIONS,
Kern County, 1961



Data from 1961 survey.

days during the year (Table 3). For this they averaged $1,483.00 or $10.56 for each day they worked. Their problem is not so much the amount of the daily wage as it is too short a work year.

These figures, however, are broad averages which cover both general and seasonal workers, and women and children as well as male heads of households. The underemployment of seasonal workers shows up more plainly when their days of work are compared to those of general farm workers, 101 days as compared to 233. Again, the comparison is imperfect because two-thirds of the seasonal workers were housewives or youths. Heads of seasonal worker households averaged 133 days of work, or over 100 days less than the 246 days by general farm workers who were heads of households. They also averaged much less in their individual earnings for the year, $1,223 as compared to $3,044.

All underemployment of seasonal workers can't be attributed to the mechanization of cotton harvesting. Many of them were underemployed previously. Yet a reduction of the available work year, by from 60 to 90 days, has had its effect. As mechanization is extended the length of the work year as presently constituted will be cut again. As potato picking and cotton chopping are mechanized, the work opportunities for women and children will be drastically reduced. Then the head of the household will need earnings large enough to support the entire family. He will be unable to do this with irregular seasonal employment.

Month-by-Month Employment

Ten years ago thousands of workers came into Kern County in September and October to engage in the cotton harvest. Hundreds more were hauled in on a day-to-day basis by labor contractors from Los Angeles and other population centers. Seasonality of labor use in the county now is only a fraction of what it used to be, yet it still is the major factor in the underemployment of the seasonal farm workers. Employment of the farm work force as a whole varied from 30 percent of all workers in March to 82 percent in June.[1/] Regularity of employment differed widely as between general farm workers and seasonal workers. Employment of the general farm workers was at a minimum in February and March with 72 percent of them employed. Ninety-two percent were employed in June (Table 4).

1/ Employment of the seasonal workers was too irregular to fit smoothly into monthly patterns. Hence, a worker was regarded as employed if he worked for 12 days or more during the designated month. This overstates the amount of employment.

TABLE 3

Employment and Earnings of Selected Groups of Farm Workers, Kern County, 1961

Group	Total workers in sample [a]	Average days worked during year	Average earnings	
			For the year	Per day
	workers	days	dollars	
All workers	696	140	1,483	10.56
General farm workers	177	233	2,847	12.22
Seasonal workers	425	101	854	8.46
All heads of households [b]	350	191	2,199	11.51
Heads of seasonal households	159	133	1,233	8.95
Wives	156	80	673	8.41
School youth	70	52	412	7.92
Nonschool youth	93	130	1,145	8.81
Local workers	493	146	1,634	11.19
Migrants	203	126	1,117	8.87
Cotton only [c]	99	76	703	9.25
Potatoes only	59	82	964	11.76
Grapes only	43	119	1,349	11.34
Cotton, potatoes	48	116	996	8.59
Cotton, grapes	34	106	1,118	10.55
Four or more crops	63	142	1,182	8.32

a/ Breakdowns do not include all groups in sample. For complete table see The Farm Worker in a Changing Agriculture, by William H. Metzler, op. cit.

b/ Figure excludes female heads and also those who had been farm operators and were unable to estimate their returns.

c/ Crop figures include those general farm workers closely connected with crop activities; e.g., weighers and checkers of cotton sacks but not irrigators and tractor drivers.

TABLE 4

Month-by-Month Employment of Farm Workers, Kern County, 1961,
by Type of Farm Work and by Household Status

Month	Percentage of farm workers employed during the specified month[a]						
	All workers	Type of farm work		Household status			
		Annual farm work	Seasonal farm work	Family head	Wives	School youth	Other youth
	percent						
January	38	75	22	56	21	2	29
February	36	72	17	50	13	1	19
March	30	72	10	50	13	0	23
April	47	79	30	61	24	3	47
May	68	81	62	83	44	21	70
June	82	92	75	89	58	77	97
July	69	89	57	79	45	42	83
August	56	86	45	72	33	50	61
September	60	82	51	75	38	31	44
October	61	83	51	79	39	21	42
November	50	85	34	70	28	11	31
December	46	83	32	68	24	7	27
Total workers in sample	696	177	425	350	156	70	93

a/ Percentage of farm workers who had 12 days or more of employment during the month.

On the other hand, only 16 percent of the seasonal workers were employed in March and only 75 percent in June (Figure 8).

Almost half of the nonemployment of seasonal workers was that of housewives and school students who had dropped out of the labor market. When they are eliminated, however, 7 percent of the seasonal workers in June and 39 percent in March were still not employed. Some of these also are less than full-time workers. Some stated that they did not care to work a full year. Some were old and worked only at such jobs as cotton chopping and cotton picking. Others were seasonal workers by habit and either rested, or took trips back to Oklahoma, Texas, or Mexico. The proportion of workers in this group was 13 percent during the winter months, and still was at 4 percent in June (Figure 9).

A summary of the employment status of the seasonal farm workers in the county during the high and low months of the year is as follows:

Seasonal workers who were	March	June
Employed	16 percent	75 percent
Housewives and youth not working	45 percent	18 percent
Aged, etc.	13 percent	4 percent
Unemployed and wanting work	26 percent	3 percent
TOTAL	100 percent	100 percent

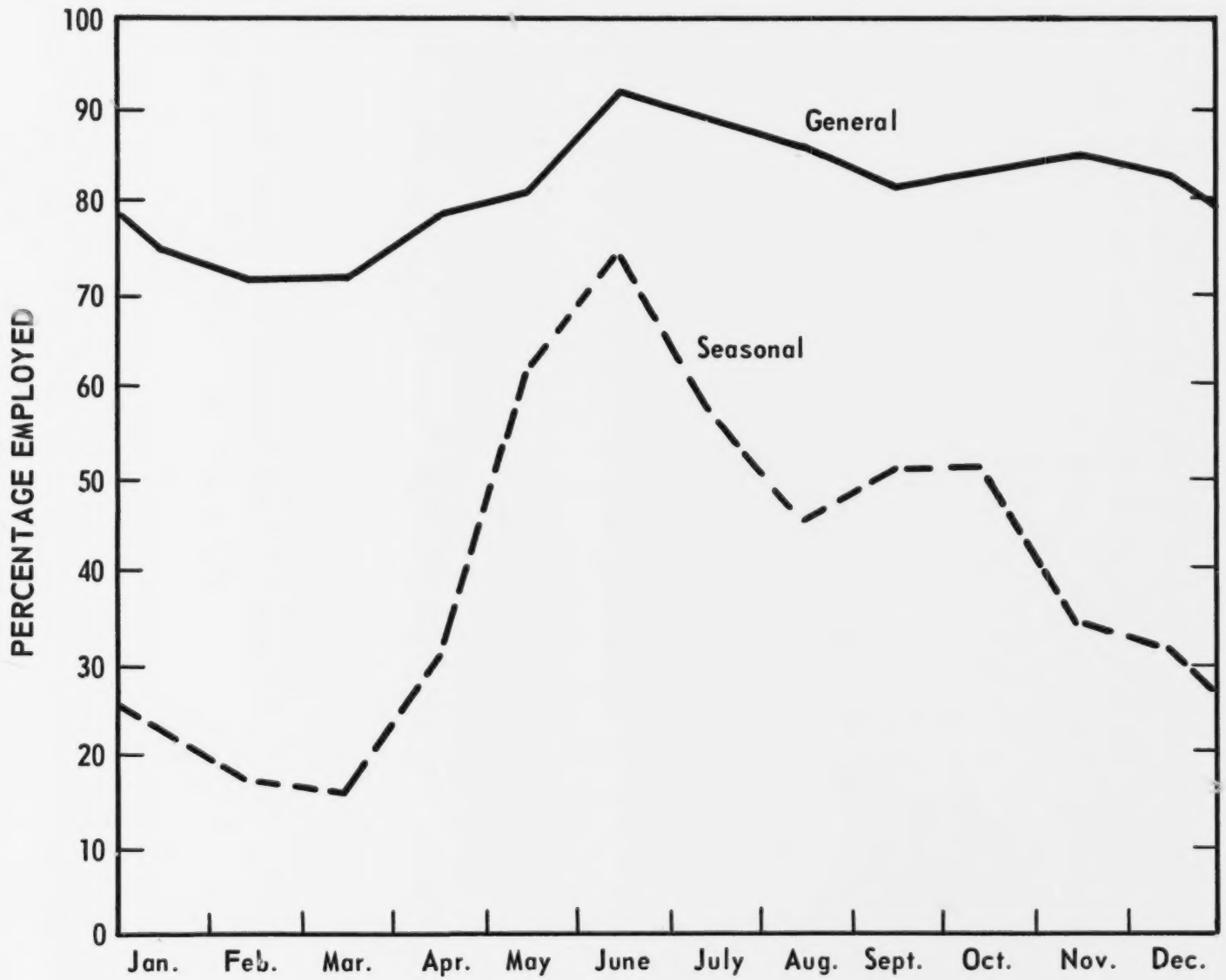
The figures indicate those employed for 12 days or more, at farm or any other type of work, and in Kern or in any other work area in the United States or Mexico. Undoubtedly, some of the housewives and the aged would have worked during March if a suitable type of employment had been available. Many of them habitually "move out of the labor market" when their type of work is over, and do not look for work until it returns.

Dependency

The Kern County Welfare Department issues surplus commodities to the families of farm workers who are unable to obtain employment during the winter months. The number of these families has increased from year to year as opportunities to pick cotton have dwindled. Actually, workers who do not prune vines or trees, pick grapes, or do general farm work are losing their place in the farm work force

FIGURE 8. PERCENTAGE OF GENERAL AND SEASONAL WORKERS WHO WERE EMPLOYED, BY MONTH 1960[a]/

Kern County



a/ Percentage employed for 12 days or more during the month.

Data from 1961 survey.

FIGURE 9. MONTH-BY-MONTH EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF FARM WORKERS,
Kern County, 1961

a/ Employed for 12 days or more during the month.

Data from 1961 survey.

in Kern County. Approximately 6,000 to 7,000, however, with the help of the County Welfare Department, are trying to maintain their foothold in the local economy. The number of unemployed families which received special grants of commodities during the winter was as follows:

December 1961	2,195 families[1/]
January 1962	3,160 families
February 1962	3,564 families
March 1962	3,279 families
April 1962	846 families - closed April 13.

Apparently half of the seasonal worker families in the county were unable to sustain themselves during the winter.

THE LABOR RECRUITMENT SYSTEM

Recent changes in recruitment practices in Kern County are giving the labor contractor more power in selecting the type of work force it will have.[2/] Farm Placement Service officials reported that in some areas and crops they hold a virtual monopoly on all seasonal jobs. If they show a preference for workers of one type over another, that type of worker will become more numerous. Other types will tend to disappear. If they say "Anglos can't pick grapes," then few Anglos will have an opportunity to learn to pick grapes. They will have to go elsewhere during the grape season to obtain employment, and may have to leave permanently.

In many crop activities in Kern County the farm worker has ceased to call on farmers to find employment. If he did, he would be told, "Go and see the labor contractor. He decides who he wants to hire."

Although the Farm Placement Service of the State Employment Service is continually occupying a more important role in the recruitment and placement process, it has had little success to date in supplanting the labor contractor. Workers

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1/ 1961 survey data indicate 1.9 workers and 4.5 persons per farm worker household.

2/ For a comprehensive analysis of the farm labor contractor system see, Bruce, Alan, Farm Labor Contractors in California, California Department of Industrial Relations, San Francisco, 1949, and Migratory Labor in American Agriculture, report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, Washington, D.C., 1951.

in Kern County said, "Even though we go to the Farm Labor Office for a job, when we get out to the farm we find that we are actually working under a labor contractor." Recent legislation extending Social Security and disability compensation coverage to farm workers has entailed a large amount of record keeping and growers are turning this responsibility over to a labor contractor.

There are a few growers, however, who have nothing to do with labor contractors. They select and hire their own workers, direct the work themselves or through foremen, make out the worker's Social Security and disability records, and try to maintain as much individual contact with the workers as possible. They claim that this method engenders a higher performance and greater sense of responsibility. Yet the number of growers who are willing to perform these supervisory functions appears to be decreasing.

The Labor Contractor System

Workers who are unable to speak English or who otherwise are unable to bargain for themselves need an intermediary to speak for them. A person who goes into the business of being a spokesman gradually attains some degree of economic power, both over the workers whom he represents and in relation to the growers with whom he negotiates a labor contract. In past years, labor contractors have developed a bad reputation, because some have tended to take advantage of their workers.[1/] California laws now require that they be licensed and bonded. This has been partially effective in reducing the amount of exploitation.[2/]

The recent regulations in regard to Social Security and disability insurance for farm workers have greatly increased the power and functions of the labor contractor. He is keeping employment records for the grower and is becoming a more direct factor in his operations. He is also becoming a more important factor in shaping the farm labor force in the local area. The recruitment practices of labor contractors may build a labor force of migrants or nonmigrants, of "skid-row" derelicts or of stable local citizens.

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1/ See statement of Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor, U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, Hearings, 88th Congress, 1st session, Washington, D.C.: April 10, 23, and 24, 1963, pp. 36-43. This summarizes a nationwide survey of abuses by crew leaders.

2/ California's Farm Labor Problems, Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, Sacramento, 1961, pp. 177-184.

The number of labor contractors in Kern County has not decreased in proportion to the number of seasonal jobs. According to the official Directory for 1961 there were 175 in the county in that year as compared to 192 in 1955, and 281 in 1950.[1] The largest contractors had from 300 to 500 workers in their crews, but most of them had one or two truck or bus loads -- from 20 to 50 workers. Most of them provided transportation from designated pick up points to the field. Since there was an ample supply of labor, little recruitment activity was needed.

The labor contractors who were interviewed during the 1961 survey indicated that they made no distinction between workers. "We haul out any worker who climbs on the truck." This answer, however, conceals the selective factors which are involved. A truck at a pick up point in the "skid-row" section of town will not attract housewives or school students. One picking up workers in the Negro section of town is not likely to draw Anglo workers.

Inexperienced workers sometimes reported that they had been hauled home before the day was over and told that they were monopolizing equipment which should be in the hands of a more proficient worker. Most crew leaders do not care to take the time to train "green" employees.[2] The result is that the experienced migrant who works only in one or two crops has an advantage over the less experienced local worker who would like to add to his present lines of employment. Such contractors tend to encourage specialization and migrancy.

During the 1961 survey it was observed that migrant families who had good contracts with an active labor contractor, obtained employment on the day that they arrived. Local families in the same neighborhood who had no such contact were looking unsuccessfully for this type of employment.

Workers complained that labor contractors kept putting on workers in fields where there were so many people that they were in each other's way. Since contractors are usually paid on a piece rate basis it is to their advantage to complete a job as soon as possible and move to another.[3]

1/ Licensed Farm Labor Contractors of California Official Directory, State of California, Department of Labor Law Enforcement, San Francisco for 1950, 1955, and 1961.

2/ See testimony of Raol Aguilar in Report and Recommendations of Agricultural Labor Commission, Sacramento, California, 1963, pp. 82-86.

3/ For a more detailed discussion of the tendency to overhire, see Agricultural Labor in the San Joaquin Valley, The Governor's Committee to Survey the Agricultural Resources of the San Joaquin Valley, Sacramento, 1951, pp. 189-193.

The point could be raised that the characteristics of the local agricultural labor force is much too important to be left to the decision of labor contractors. In some areas, the labor contractors are capable and responsible and tend to build a dependable local labor force. In other areas they are not, and tend to develop a labor force that is inefficient and undependable.

The recent regulations which make the labor contractor the employer for Social Security and worker disability purposes have some advantages. They allow seasonal workers a greater opportunity to qualify for Social Security coverage. It makes no difference how many farms a worker works on, so long as he continues to work for the same contractor.

On the other hand, some very significant responsibilities are being passed on to labor contractors who may have little at stake in the community. In 1961 legal restrictions were placed on the height that women could climb, and the weight they could carry. Some labor contractors ignored the fact that some women needed to work. They simply laid down the rule. "We aren't hiring any women to pick cotton" or "We'll hire only those women who have a man with them who is able to empty their cotton sacks." As they approach having a monopoly of the seasonal jobs in a crop or area, they have the same power over the bread and butter of most other seasonal farm workers.

Types of Labor Contractors

A small number of labor contractors are migratory, and follow the harvest of one crop, such as peas or potatoes, from place to place. They may move one step ahead of their crews and arrange jobs, housing, and transportation for them. They usually are specialized in one operation, and promote specialization and migrancy among their workers.

Farm labor contractors who operate in one area are of several types. Some work only in one operation such as potato picking, or plum picking, at which they have become expert, and they generally try to recruit for the same growers each year. They do a good job in their special operation, but do not fit the needs of seasonal farm workers who must work in several local operations. Their services contribute to irregular employment. All labor contractors who lived in the sample areas for the 1961 survey were interviewed. Only one out of ten operated in more than one or two crops.

Some local farm labor contractors deal only in "skid-row" labor. They have a truck or trucks which they drive up to the customary "day-haul" area on

"skid row" each morning. They arrive early in order to fill their trucks with workers before other contractors can take them. They haul out a different crew each morning, depending on the desirability of their work and on the stability of the workers. Kern County has less of a problem with this type of contractor and this type of worker because it has no clearly defined "skid-row" area. Yet it has contractors who specialize in the available workers of this type. Some workers reported that they had left jobs rather than to have their families associate with such people.

Some contractors are highly opportunistic and operate only at periods of peak labor demand. They seem to have little concern for their workers at other times. They may recruit their sporadic work force from "skid row," from the neighborhood, or they may truck them in daily from the outside. Some formerly hauled workers to Kern County from Los Angeles to assist in the cotton harvest. Ordinarily their workers have too short a period of employment to qualify them for Social Security coverage.

The most constructive type of labor contractor has a following of local workers who look to him continuously for job contacts. He recruits for several operations and for several employers. He tries to maintain the same work force and the same employers. He creates stability and mutual understanding. Yet he is sometimes the victim of transient contractors who underbid him on jobs or take away his workers.

The Role of the Grower

The change from mass employment to use of a smaller and more skilled labor force means that the role of the grower is changing. Some growers reported that they were reorganizing their employment policies in line with the new situation. The changes they reported included: diversification of their operations to cut down seasonal peaks and increase the length of the work season, selection of labor contractors as labor foremen who would select and maintain a stable labor force. Growers are now coming into a better position to select the type of labor contractors and farm workers that they want for their industry and for their community.

TRENDS TOWARD LABOR STABILIZATION

In 1949, when seasonal labor needs in Kern County mounted to a peak of 15,000 workers in June, dropped to 3,000 in July, rose to a second peak of

31,000 in October, and dropped to 600 workers in February and March, consideration of a stable local labor force appeared to be useless. Now that the peak number of workers needed is approaching 5,000 to 7,000, the problem of stabilizing labor use is approaching a manageable size.

Several developments in the state begin to supply possible patterns of action in a stabilization program. Some of these are only remotely connected with labor stabilization, yet they constitute trends that can be utilized by growers in considering such a program and putting it into effect.1/

Grower Organizations to Handle Labor

Grower organizations to discuss labor problems and labor policies have had a long history in California. In some areas, growers have also made an effort to set up labor recruitment and labor distribution organizations, rather than to leave recruitment of a labor supply up to labor contractors, the Employment Service, or individual effort. They have also formed associations to recruit foreign workers, house them, assign them to individual growers, and reassign them as needed. They have, then, been developing a background of experience in the management of labor needs and labor supplies.

In recent years there has been a significant revival of these grower activities. Local recruitment organizations have been set up and operated successfully in several counties. The State Farm Bureau has endorsed a county-by-county program for growers to handle the recruitment and placement of domestic workers. These activities indicate a trend toward grower management of their labor supply problem, on a broad rather than a purely local basis. Such a trend is almost inevitable in an economy in which the main feature has been the substitution of efficient organization for chance and uncertainty.

Grower organizations to handle labor recruitment might conceivably bring in new groups of workers each season and release them when the season was over, thus adding to labor surpluses and underemployment. This, however, is contrary to developing trends toward efficient management. The trend instead can be expected to be in the direction of selecting dependable workers, and endeavoring to keep them -- as employees and as residents in the community. Grower

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1/ For a discussion of labor stabilization see California's Farm Labor Problems, Part I, Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, Sacramento, 1961.

groups would gradually work in the direction of establishing a dependable work force.

It is possible that some grower organizations might take over the activities of the labor contractors in distributing labor to growers, keeping records, making Social Security deductions, and the like. The labor contractors are so useful in this respect, however, that they are likely to be retained. Grower associations can still coordinate their activities and insure better selection and more efficient management of labor resources.

Experimentation with Selected and Trained Crews

In Tulare County two experiments were made to develop crews of workers who were trained to perform all local tasks and who would have close to year-round employment.[1/] These experiments indicated that as much as 299 days of work could be obtained for a crew, but that this did not mean continuous employment for its members. In fact very few workers stayed with these crews for more than 50 days. Whether the high rate of turnover was due to faults in the management, to irregular work habits of the members, to worker specialization, or to different status levels for the jobs obtained, was not ascertained. The idea should be carried forward by established crew leaders rather than by organizations which must recruit workers from other crews.

New Breeds and Varieties

Constant experimentation is being conducted by public and private agencies and by individual growers in an effort to breed new varieties of fruits, vegetables, and other crops. In the past, the main effort has been to develop varieties with higher yields, better flavor, and greater immunity to disease. Another purpose is gradually becoming more important -- to develop varieties with special ripening characteristics. This includes in the case of crops like tomatoes and cotton, varieties that mature on an even schedule so that machine harvest methods can be used efficiently. This not only requires that all fruits on a plant mature at the same time, but also that the period of growth be so uniform that the time of the harvest can be spread out by staggering the time of the plantings.

1/ Thor, Eric, and David J. Allee, Stabilizing Temporary Farm Labor Supply and Employment Through Year-Round Crews, Berkeley: University of California, 1963, and Year-Round Crew Experiment, Tulare County, California, Berkeley: University of California, Division of Agricultural Sciences, September 1964.

Probably the ideal result, so far as timing is concerned, is to develop varieties that will provide a continuous flow to the market over as long a period as possible. This will also mean more continuous use of labor both for cultural operations and for the harvest.

Increase in Farm Size and Diversification

The trend in Kern County is toward larger and more diversified farm operations, and this also leads toward more continuous employment of farm workers. Farm operators buy large and expensive equipment and then endeavor to make it yield a profit.[1/] For most of them this means increasing the size of their operations, for the larger ones it means experimentation with new crops which will smooth out their annual work season. In either case it means keeping equipment and workers busy on as close to a year-round basis as possible. To keep a dependable work force busy also has numerous advantages over breaking in new workers for each crop or season.[2/]

Under a hand-labor system, the worker bore the major risk of seasonality. He cost the grower little if anything while unemployed. The more completely that agriculture is mechanized, the more completely the grower bears the risk, and the more likely there is to be a replanning of farm enterprises. This trend is not directly oriented toward improving the economic position of the seasonal worker, but those who find a place in the new structure of farming will be among the major beneficiaries.

Increase in Farm Wage Rates

According to the Statistical Reporting Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, average farm wage rates in California have risen as follows since 1950:

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1/ For relationship of farm size to mechanization see, Faris, J. E., Economies Associated with Size, Kern County Cash-Crop Farms, Berkeley: University of California, Agr. Expt. Sta., Giannini Found. Res. Rept. No. 269, 1963.

2/ For anticipated changes in labor demand in California, see Seasonal Labor in California Agriculture, Berkeley: University of California, 1963; see also, Dean, G. W., and C. O. McCorkle, Projections Relating to California Agriculture in 1975, Berkeley: University of California, Calif. Agr. Expt. Sta., Giannini Found. Mimeo. Report No. 234, 1960.

Year	Rate per hour	Year	Rate per hour	Year	Rate per hour
1950	$ .88	1955	$1.05	1960	$1.21
1951	.96	1956	1.10	1961	1.25
1952	1.02	1957	1.12	1962	1.27
1953	1.04	1958	1.13	1963	1.32
1954	1.03	1959	1.17		

This is an increase in approximately 50 percent over a period of 13 years, and the trend is expected to continue. This rapid rate of increase provides an impetus to further mechanization, and also toward more efficient use of labor resources. It can be expected to lead to more careful selection of farm workers and to more continuous employment for those who are worth the higher rates of pay.

New Elements in the Labor Force

Within the last several years large numbers of new workers have been moving into Kern County. Some of these are Spanish American workers from South Texas who have been accustomed to work in cotton, citrus fruit, and vegetables in that area. More, however, are coming directly from Mexico and require some training in methods used in this country. Most of the new workers have large families. The "greencard" workers from Mexico come in originally as singles, but an increasing proportion bring families back with them as they return from trips to Mexico.

The new workers have two characteristics which are specially adapted to a labor stabilization program. First, most of them are not highly specialized but tend to shift from one crop or operation to another. Second, their strong family system inclines them to settle in one place unless migration becomes an economic necessity. They do like, however, to have work for the children rather than for the head of the family only.

Growers praise these workers as being much more industrious and dependable than their predecessors in seasonal farm labor. If they are forced into roving habits, however, they may soon lose their dependability.

POSSIBLE OBSTACLES TO LABOR STABILIZATION

A variety of circumstances might conceivable slow the trend toward labor stabilization in Kern County. Some of these are associated with farm operators,

others with crew leaders, and the most significant ones with the workers themselves.

Farm Operators

The growers in Kern County apparently have not been accustomed to function together in a unitary way. Specialization in crops has led to specialization of interests. The cotton growers manifest a good deal of unity of purpose and action; so do the potato growers, and the grape growers. But historically, the grape growers in particular have not functioned closely with producers of other crops. The changes in labor demand that are occurring, however, may facilitate a greater degree of cooperation. In the past the high demand for seasonal labor has been by cotton and potato growers, and grape growers could be of little assistance to them because they also needed their work force at the time of the peak needs in cotton and potato production. In the future grapes will be the heavy seasonal crop, and the needs of cotton and potato growers for seasonal labor will no longer be directly competitive. Cooperative relationships in keeping a local labor force busy will be easier and be to the advantage of all groups.

Grape growers have had little patience with Anglo workers in the past for three major reasons. First, they wanted workers who would stay with them through the harvest, or for even a longer period, and Anglo workers have tended to leave whenever they heard of another job that might pay a little better. Second, Anglo workers have never gained the skill in packing grapes that has been attained by Filipinos, nor by the Spanish American workers, who also do an acceptable job. And third, some jobs in grapes, such as girdling, are dirty, and few Anglo workers will stay with them. The extent to which Anglo workers can remain in local seasonal labor may depend on the extent to which grape growers are willing to accept them, particularly for the harvest, but also for pruning, training, and girdling.

Some growers in Kern County have advocated farm labor stabilization for many years. Others have been cool to it, possibly because they have had a more distant relationship to their farm workers. The use of masses of laborers is conducive to impersonal relationships. The viewpoint of such growers, however, can be expected to change. Impersonal management is a distinct handicap in working with a relatively small staff of skilled workers, so lack of interest in workers as individuals is likely to diminish or disappear.

Some farm operators fearthat localization of the work force may lead to unionization. This possibility merits careful consideration in the light of the changing labor situation in the county. First, the highly independent migratory worker is being supplanted by a new labor force. The new workers are not only more skilled, but also tend to be more stable and self-respecting. This applies also to the "greencard" workers. These workers are going to pose a new type of problem both to growers and to union organizers. Mechanization has increased the power of the individual worker and sound personnel management has become much more important than before.

In the second place, an examination of the strikes in California agriculture indicates that most of them have occurred in operations and areas using a large number of outside workers, and that the strikes have usually been called by outsiders.[1/] It was the stable local workers who showed the greatest loyalty to their employers. The most important asset to growers in the new farm economy is likely to be mutuality of interest and outlook between themselves and their workers. The more perishable the crop, the greater the need for mutuality. A fully employed local labor force is likely to be an asset as compared to one that lacks ties with the growers and the community. While it will not guarantee a complete absence of labor conflicts, they can be made less intense than they have been in the past.

Labor Contractors

Two types of labor contractors tend to impede the free flow of labor from job to job, first, those who specialize in workers of the same ethnic background, and second, those who limit their contracting to a few lines of work. Continuous employment for local workers requires that they be trained in the efficient performance of several seasonal operations. Many labor contractors, however, are proficient in only one or two operations themselves and would have to learn new ones in order to render such a service.

The easy way for the labor contractor to operate is to hire experienced workers, irrespective of their place of origin. In fact, his existence depends to some extent on rendering a service to workers and to farmers who are not familiar with the labor market. If the labor market became stabilized, his function might be greatly reduced, or change to that of being a labor foreman.

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1/ Jamieson, Stuart, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1945.

Labor contractors, then, are not likely to promote labor stabilization unless they are influenced to do so by the growers.

Farm Workers

The workers in the 1961 survey reported all the jobs they had held during the past 12 months. The percentage of workers in the various ethnic groups and the percentage of the jobs they held in selected crops was as follows:

	Percentage of all workers who were:	Percentage of all jobs they held in:			
		Cotton	Potatoes	Grapes	Vegetables
Anglo-American	45	39	56	10	8
Spanish American	25	24	29	44	0
Mexican	11	13	11	28	37
Negro	14	22	3	7	50
Other	5	2	1	11	5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Members of the different ethnic groups tend to concentrate on some lines of work and to avoid others. Anglo workers still work in potatoes and cotton, but few work in grapes or vegetables. Seventy-two percent of the jobs in grapes were reported by Spanish Americans and Mexicans, and some of these workers migrated to the county to do this work. Other data in the 1961 survey indicate that during the grape harvest from 23 to 25 percent of the heads of Anglo households and from 25 to 31 percent of the heads of Negro households were not working. Grape growers reported that Filipino, Spanish American, and Mexican workers were more expert in this work. It is understandable that workers who specialize in rough jobs such as cotton and potato picking would require careful training for work so meticulous as packing grapes. The scarcity of Anglo workers in vegetable operations involves another factor -- the low status of "stoop labor."

The Social Status of Jobs

Among some of our more prosperous ancestors, any work with the hands, particularly if it was dirty or heavy or involved stooping or lifting, was regarded as menial and was only done by people of a lower social status. This tradition has been most prevalent in those parts of the world in which there were people

with highly different ethnic and social backgrounds. It disappeared in many parts of the United States where farmers and the members of their families did their own labor -- digging ditches, hauling hay, hoeing and harvesting their crops, washing dishes, and cleaning house. The dignity of honest toil became linked with democracy.

In many areas of the United States there are no status lines between farm jobs and workers move between any and all work that needs to be done. In the intensive farming areas of the Southwest, however, status levels have become attached to many farm jobs.[1/] Workers refuse to engage in the jobs that are "beneath" them. To do so would result in loss of group respect. Status lines result in dividing the available jobs between several seasonal labor forces, and an increase in their underemployment.

Status lines vary to some extent as between the localities in which they exist, but involve the following elements:

1. The ethnic and cultural background of the workers.
2. The difficulty and disagreeableness of the work.
3. Whether the work is done singly or in gangs under a crew boss.
4. Differentials in the rates of pay.

"Stoop-labor" jobs in vegetables and sugar beets generally stand at the bottom of the status scale. The status of another group of jobs varies locally with the social level of the workers who perform them. These jobs include picking grapes, cotton, potatoes, berries, and citrus fruits. As "low status" workers move into jobs in irrigating, picking deciduous fruits, and handling farm equipment, they tend to carry the "stoop labor" label with them.

The artificiality of status lines becomes apparent when groups of "high-status" workers perform "stoop" labor. For example, high school students were used successfully during World War II to do many "stoop-labor" jobs. When such work is done by groups in which group opinion overcomes individual feelings, loss of self-respect does not occur. The performance of "menial" tasks in connection with service in the armed forces also served to dissipate many status lines.

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1/ The Status Seekers by Vance Packard, David McKay Inc., 1959, a popular presentation of occupational and other status levels in the United States. It outlines status changes that can be expected to result from mechanization and automation. Not With the Fist by Ruth D. Tuck, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1946, analyzes the status lives in a Mexican-American community in the Southwest.

Work status lines are not as tightly drawn in Kern County as in some agricultural areas in the state, probably because the large number of Anglo workers has upheld the status of cotton and potato jobs. Work in grapes and melons have been approaching the "stoop-labor" designation because of the heavy use of non-Anglo workers, but none of the grape operations seem to be in the same class as weeding vegetables or thinning sugar beets.

The reduction in number of cotton and potato jobs will result in a radical change in the status of seasonal farm jobs. If Anglo workers do not shift into some of the "stoop-labor" jobs, it may become impossible for them to continue in seasonal farm employment.

Other Aspects of Job Specialization

Several other and more definable aspects of lack of flexibility to move from job to job exist. Many seasonal workers are highly skilled in performing one operation and would prefer to move from place to place to engage in it rather than to have to learn to do other jobs at which they have no outstanding skill. Among these workers are Anglo potato, cotton, and peach pickers; shed workers in potatoes; and Filipino asparagus and grape workers. They regard themselves as professionals, and take pride in the fact that their employers expect them to be back each year (Table 5).

The following groups of migratory workers still work in Kern County and will tend to continue unless special consideration is given to local workers:

1. Harvest workers who move between grape operations in Kern County and those in Fresno, San Joaquin, and Sonoma counties.

2. Peach and plum workers who move to apricot, plum, peach, pear, and other deciduous fruit harvests over the state.

3. Potato (machine, hauling, and shed) workers who move between potato harvests in San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, San Joaquin, and Siskiyou counties in California and the Klamath and Redmond areas in Oregon.

4. Vegetable and melon workers who shift to other vegetable and melon areas.

A few of their jobs may be so highly skilled as to warrant a worker moving from one area of the state to another. In most cases, however, the necessary skills can be easily acquired and the social costs would be reduced if workers would learn several skills and shift from one to another in their home area.

TABLE 5

Ethnic Background and Migrancy of Workers in Selected Operations
Kern County, 1961

Month and operation	Number workers at peak of season[a]	Percentage of workers who were[b]							
		Anglo-American	Spanish American	Mexican	Negro	Other	Local non-migrant	Local out-migrant	In-migrant
Dec., Jan., Feb.									
Pruning grapes	3,000	11	42	29	3	15	48	15	37
Jan., Feb.									
Cutting potatoes	500	94	6	--	--	--	71	18	11
March, April									
Picking peas	1,000	58	12	23	7	--	27	4	69
April									
Thinning fruit	2,000	30	33	33	4	--	30	3	67
May, June, July									
Picking potatoes	5,500	56	29	11	3	1	17	29	54
Chopping cotton	3,500	41	24	14	18	3	58	15	27
Harvesting onions	600	11	46	43	--	--	25	11	64
Shed work in potatoes	--	94	6	--	--	--	55	24	21
June									
Picking plums	1,900	37	16	37	10	--	35	30	35
Picking peaches	700	65	4	31	--	--	--	31	69
Girdling grapes[c]	3,000	11	42	29	3	15	48	15	37
July, Aug., Sept.									
Picking grapes	4,200	10	44	28	7	11	43	24	33
Shed work in grapes	--	36	55	5	4	--	82	14	4
Sept., Oct., Nov.									
Picking cotton	4,000	37	25	12	26	--	50	25	25
Work in gin or compress	--	67	15	3	15	--	56	26	18
December									
Picking oranges	150	35	50	10	--	5	45	10	45
General									
General farm worker	--	72	8	0	20	--	75	17	8
General hand worker	--	37	43	13	7	--	63	27	10
Machine operator	--	82	10	1	7	--	55	29	16
Irrigator	--	55	25	2	18	--	58	16	26
Other general farm[d]	--	80	6	--	9	5	80	6	14

a/ Estimates by Kern County Farm Labor Office, California State Employment Service.

b/ Percentages from 1961 survey of farm labor in Kern County.

c/ Tabulation combined with pruning grapes in 1961 survey.

d/ Largely technical and supervisory.

A much larger proportion of the specialized workers, however, are specialized because they grew up in one line of work, and have either not tried other lines or have found after a short trial that they could not do as well as they could at their specialty. Such workers comment, "If I can't make $2 an hour at a job, I don't see any sense in staying with it." Or proficiency may not be involved. Workers who had worked only in cotton were asked why they didn't work in grapes. The usual answer was, "We always have worked in cotton. We never did work in grapes. The Filipinos and Mexicans do that." Most workers follow an annual routine of employment rather than to try to learn how to perform new lines of work. There are, however, no special facilities at present to train them to do those new types of work. They probably also would hesitate to patronize training programs that were set up, unless public opinion backed up the effort.

Both crew leaders and workers reported a factor which may be of primary importance -- the prevalence of unpleasant experiences in the fields where there are "mixed" crews. Some workers reported that they could not take their families out on some types of jobs because workers with offensive personal habits would embarrass them. At other times clannish workers had conspired to give them the poorest rows. Friction of these types causes crew leaders to avoid "mixed" crews, and workers to shun some types of work.

If status and specialization trends continue, the only nucleus for a stabilized seasonal labor force would be Mexican and other foreign workers. Anglo and Negro workers would need to learn to do as good a job in grape operations as the Filipino and Spanish American employees. In order to obtain adequate employment they would also need to engage in some of the vegetable operations. Otherwise, their chance to remain in the seasonal labor market is not good.

SOME COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS

California growers have stated for many years that farm workers should have a "satisfactory economic status the year around."[1/] They have been uncertain, however, as to how to secure it for them. There has been general

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1/ See The Recruitment and Placement of Farm Laborers in California, 1950, Joint Legislative Committee on Agriculture and Livestock Problems, State Senate, Sacramento, 1951. Especially Exhibit No. 7, "Testimony presented to Governor's Committee on the Agricultural Labor Resources of the San Joaquin Valley."

agreement that regular employment is better for these people than: (a) make-work employment, (b) unemployment insurance, or (c) welfare assistance. Growers have hoped for years that mechanization would cut down the high peaks of labor need, reduce seasonal unemployment, and eliminate the heavy seasonal expenditures for relief of unemployed farm workers.

Mechanization has added to the need for action at the community level. The seasonal labor force that still remains in Kern County is utilized to only a fraction of its productive ability. This means that it has only a fraction of the purchasing power that is needed for it to play its part in the local exchange system. To increase both its productivity and earnings would constitute a major advance in the general rate of economic growth.

Movement of farm workers into and out of the community has also been a disadvantage. It has called for approximately 2,000 more dwellings than would have been needed by members of a stable local labor force. Most of these are substandard houses, cabins, or shelters.

Haphazard migrant movements will continue in the more seasonal areas in California, but in Kern County the problem of migrants and underemployed seasonals can be solved. How rapidly and completely this is done will depend on the activities of the growers and the labor contractors.

While specific guidelines for grower and community action in such a period of labor readjustment do not exist, existing techniques of group action can be tried. Local discussion and leadership could formulate policies and activities. All activity could be on the basis of cooperation and mutual understanding rather than on the basis of central management. More efficient action can often be obtained among individual enterprisers when the activities constitute a common effort to meet a common problem, rather than to be developed by an individual hired to do the job.

A community can lose resources in many ways. Two of them are pertinent to the present discussion. One is to pay out wages to workers who take their earnings outside the area. This is particularly wasteful if there are local people who are without employment and who, therefore, have little to spend and who may instead become a burden on local tax resources. The second is to educate and train youth who have to go elsewhere in order to make a contribution to the production system.

Worker Responsibilities

Workers generally have been highly independent, ready to walk off a job, or to leave the area whenever some condition did not suit them instead of discussing differences and making an effort to arrive at a common understanding. Such workers do not merit nor receive the consideration that is extended to cooperative employees. If they are to receive the consideration that they expect, they will need to learn how to function as responsible members of a working group.

The highly independent person is even more of a problem when he becomes a general farm worker. The efficiency of a mechanized farm depends on workers who cooperate with each other and with the management.

The overspecialization of seasonal farm workers and their unwillingness to do some types of farm jobs has already been discussed. If public opinion -- and with it the worker's opinion -- in regard to such jobs is changed, he will find that he can shift between such jobs as hoeing weeds and driving a tractor without injury to his self-respect.

Employer-Employee Relationships

The relationships between farm operators and their general farm employees have generally been most amicable as compared to those with seasonal workers. General farm workers often do the same type of work as the farm operator and a person-to-person relationship develops. It is usual for the employer to express appreciation for work well done and to promote those workers whose work is outstanding. The employee gains a feeling of growth and achievement. Such relationships fit in well with the American ideal of economic advancement.

Hand workers will still be a part of the agricultural production structure, however, particularly for fruit and vegetable crops, and differences in economic interest may occiasionally arise. Fortunately, the techniques of managing a labor force are improving rapidly and Kern County growers are cognizant of the trend.[1/] More attention is given both to the development of the individual workers and to the use of methods which will maximize his output. Further application of these techniques should build more cooperative relationships between farm workers and their employers.

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1/ Agricultural Labor and Its Effective Use by John H. MacGillivray and Robert A. Stevens, The National Press, Palo Alto, California, 1964, summarizes the recent developments in training and handling workers and in increasing their output.

ASSISTING THE STABILIZATION PROCESS

The elimination of high seasonal peaks of labor use alone does not necessarily mean a stabilization of the labor force nor the elimination of migratory labor. It may mean instead that the waves of workers entering and leaving the county are smaller, but just as numerous as before. A succession of working groups can come in, one for peas, another for sugar beets, and still others for potatoes, plums, peaches, melons, and grapes. The critical question is how to develop a stable group of local workers who will shift from one operation to another as they occur during the season.

The answer to this question depends largely on the actions of growers, labor contractors, workers, and other local groups acting on a voluntary basis. Action could either be on an organized, unified basis under the guidance of a local association or committee, or it could be on the basis of individual action and a mutual understanding as to the goals to be achieved. A climate of opinion favorable to stabilization would be basic in either case. Local organizations and the local press could develop such a set of values; a discussion and publicity campaign would help to make a stabilization program effective.

Some of the lines of action toward stabilization might be as follows:

1. A common understanding among growers and labor contractors to give a preference to local workers.

2. Growers to give a preference to labor contractors who utilize stable crews of local workers.

3. Labor contractors to agree to accept and train local workers in new lines of work and to maintain the stability of their crews, also to clear labor with each other as needed. During busy seasons a central clearing agency might be an advantage. Definite work contracts between labor contractors and workers.

4. Local educational and publicity agencies to develop a climate of opinion upgrading jobs which have had a low social status. Growers having such jobs to see that wage rates and earnings are in line with those in other activities.

5. Special training programs for resident workers who have been displaced by mechanization.

6. Experimentation with new crops and varieties which are likely to spread the work season.

7. Housing programs designed to stabilize farm workers and to discourage "floaters."

8. Welfare programs designed to train workers in new skills rather than to perpetuate underemployment.

Guiding the Activities of Labor Contractors

The labor contracting system is gradually becoming more stable and responsible, but it can do much more toward developing local pools of capable and reliable workers.

The labor contracting system can do this when farm employers coordinate their own activities so as to require it. Contractors can provide them with information as to the capable local workers who should be given preferential employment. Growers can also see that the contractors refer such workers to other contractors when they have no work for them. By keeping such workers employed in the community, a force of capable local workers can be built up which will be adequate to meet the seasonal labor needs.

Retraining the Displaced Worker

Workers who are displaced by machinery may or may not be regarded as a community problem. If they have developed an attachment and loyalty to the community, that value needs to be compared to that of workers who come in to take out whatever they can. If they are buying homes, this value should be compared to that of a floating population. Responsible community agencies might do well to look over the people who have become stable residents and ascertain what needs to be done to enable them to continue. Counseling and retraining programs for those who have been displaced by machinery could be a sound community investment.

Youth probably are in need of the most immediate attention. Many are not financially able to strike out for themselves, yet find it frustrating to remain in a home and community that have no use for them. Youth in farm labor families need to learn to do farm or other work. Otherwise, labor importation may become the only way to get seasonal farm work done.

Many of the displaced people, however, need little or no retraining. What many need is preferential consideration for employment over transients who may be less cautious in stating their abilities. Nonfarm, as well as farm employers, could extend them this consideration.

Smoothing Out the Work Year

When the cotton and potato operations in Kern County have been mechanized, some irregularity in labor use will still remain. There are likely to be three

high and three low periods of labor demand (Figure 10). The major peak in labor need will be at the time of the grape harvest -- from late July to early October. The second will be in January and February when vine and tree pruning, potato cutting, and the citrus harvest requires some 4,000 to 5,000 workers. The third busy period will start with peach and plum thinning in April and run through the potato and plum harvests in May and June.

These three busy periods should supply seasonal farm workers with from 150 to 180 days of employment which is still too few to provide for their needs and to supply much of a boost to the local economy. There will be three gaps in their employment during the course of the year, the long and troublesome one from mid-February to mid-April, a minor drop in July, and one from mid-October to late December.

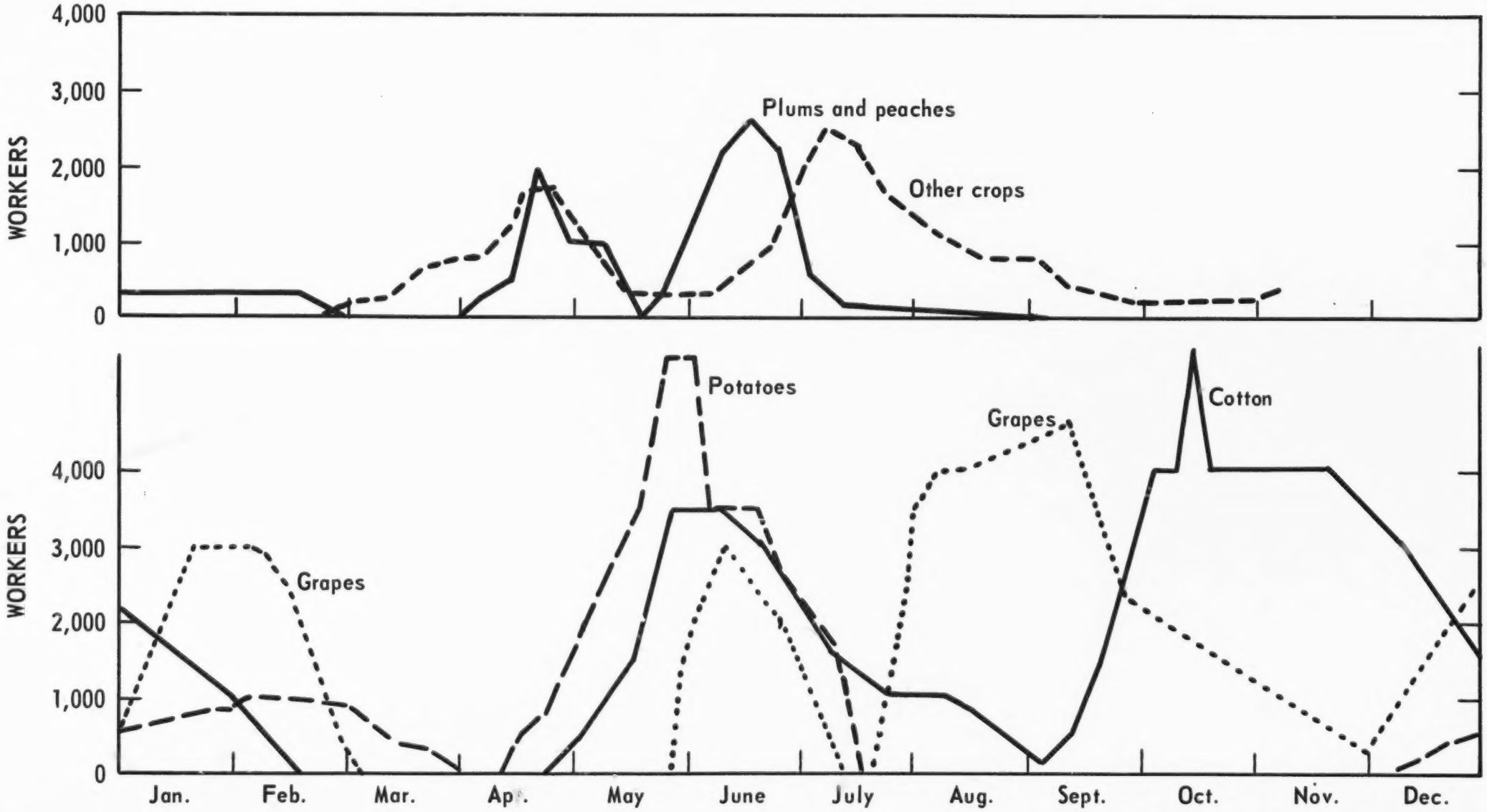
The minor dip in labor use in July could be overcome by the production of more onions or melons, or of different varieties of grapes or peaches. Yet a weather factor has also been involved at this period of the year. Some of the movement out of the county at this time has been associated with a desire to be elsewhere during the hottest summer months. Whether workers would stay in order to have continuous employment would depend on the type of local labor force that is developed.

The slack period that will follow the grape harvest can also be alleviated by later varieties of grapes and by more olives and citrus. In the past, late fall crops have been at a disadvantage because the cotton harvest provided such strong competition for labor. With this removed, the production of other fall crops is likely to expand. This could mean a gradual 30- to 60-day increase in the seasonal work year.

The real problem will be to reduce the perennial gap that occurs between winter pruning activities in February and the beginning of cultural activities in April. This same gap appears in the labor needs in all but a few of the high labor-using areas of the state. In Kern County pea picking and sugar beet thinning still utilize some hand labor at this season of the year, but both operations will soon be fully mechanized.

Experimentation on new crops is likely to turn on a more important consideration than the timing of the harvest; that is, on their profitability in competition with other crops. The local USDA experiment station has started a research program in fruit and vegetable crops and can assist in cutting the cost

FIGURE 10. LABOR REQUIREMENTS FOR MAJOR CROPS
Kern County, 1961



Estimates by California State Employment Service.

of experimentation. Local experiments by farmers are also yielding practical results.

Housing

There are five major types of farm labor housing in Kern County:

1. Most numerous are the single-family dwellings in East Bakersfield, Lamont, Arvin, Shafter, McFarland, Delano, and other towns or cities. Many of these houses were constructed by workers from family earnings as farm laborers.

2. Housing in large camps, constructed originally by the Federal government, now operated by grower associations with the assistance of public housing authorities, or by other local agencies. Year-round farm workers live in the more permanent structures, seasonal migrants move in and out of the temporary "shelters."

3. Housing in grower camps, which is most common in the grape area. This is mostly for single workers.

4. Housing in small private camps. Some camps are maintained by labor contractors, others by ex-farm workers who have invested their savings in cheap rental property.

5. Housing in new Public Housing Authority Units, which occur in clusters in the urban farm labor residential areas. The farm workers who live in these units are generally year-round employees.

It became apparent during the survey that a close relationship existed between the type of housing and the attitudes and the stability of the workers. The people in the metal shelters in the large camps, and those in the small private camps with housing at low rentals were the most migratory. Many workers in these units had moved from camp to camp over the state, year after year. The only "home" they could point to was Texas or Oklahoma, even though they hadn't been back for a number of years.

At the other extreme were the families in the single-family dwellings in the different towns and cities in the county. Most of them referred to Kern County as their home, and they only left it when migration became a matter of economic necessity.

Migrancy varied with housing conditions in another way. The poorest camps were the last to be occupied for the work season, and the first to become empty. Observant growers reported that comfortable housing attracted stable workers

and often caused other workers to settle down. On the other hand, poor, unattractive housing tended to speed up migration.

One aspect of a labor stabilization program, therefore, might be the removal of the poorest farm labor housing, either public or private. A predetermined proportion of it should not be replaced since many of the casual migrants into the county are not needed. Replacement housing of a better type, suitable for year-round occupancy would tend to attract and keep a more stable group of workers.

Welfare Aspects

A shorter work year has meant that reliance on Welfare Department assistance has become part of the annual life pattern of many farm labor families.[1/] Surplus commodities were issued to more than 3,500 families during the slack season in the spring of 1962. Since these commodities are supplied by the Federal government, they are often looked upon as an added resource to the community.

A work program which emphasized regular habits of work and the learning of new skills would come much closer to meeting the needs of the people involved. This might be more expensive than the distribution of surplus commodities, but it would be an investment rather than a make-do.

A work program will be less necessary as a stable local labor force is developed. Insofar as stabilization fails to provide adequate employment, however, a work and training program would provide the unemployed with needed skills.

Legislative Assistance

Legislative activity to meet farm labor problems has increased in recent years. Some legal changes could lead toward greater stabilization of labor use.

First, changes in the Social Security laws. Employers who hire workers for less than 20 days or pay them less than $150 during a year avoid payment of Social Security premiums. This encourages hiring large crews so as to finish a seasonal task within the 20-day period. Social Security laws could be revised so as to encourage continuous employment rather than short-term hiring of casual workers.

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1/ For a discussion of the welfare aspects of seasonal unemployment see Exhibit I "Bakersfield Hearings" in The Recruitment and Placement of Farm Laborers in California, 1950, by Joint Committee on Agriculture and Livestock Problems, California State Senate, Sacramento, 1951.

Second, changes in unemployment insurance laws to cover farm workers. The graduated premium rates under this program tend to encourage spreading out of employment as well as to provide security for workers who are unemployed. It would also reduce the incentive for skilled farm workers to shift into industrial employment. Adaptations could be made to make it to a workers advantage to remain with an employer to the end of the season.

Third, provision for annual training classes for crew leaders to instruct them in their public responsibilities. In addition to handling problems of payroll deductions for Social Security and disability insurance, record keeping, and other administrative matters, some guidance could be given in employee selection and in management relationships. Such classes would tend to remove the labor contractor from his present nebulous position and give him a recognized status in the agricultural employment structure.

Fourth, provision for wage boards to settle differences in regard to wages and working conditions. Properly constituted wage boards would provide a better prospect for fair wage decisions than industrial labor conflict.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Mechanization of the cotton harvest has erased the high peak of seasonal farm labor use in Kern County. Over 30,000 workers were used at the peak of the harvest in 1949, but only 4,000 in 1962. Mechanization of the potato harvest and of cotton chopping will remove the second major peak in labor needs. In the near future, then, peak season labor requirements will be little higher than those for the rest of the year. This means that the seasonal labor problem has been trimmed to a manageable size.

Some management of labor recruitment in the county can lead to the development of a dependable local labor force and elimination of migratory labor. If this is not done, successive small waves of migrant workers may still create social and economic problems.

Much of the problem that exists in the agricultural labor market in California is due to the fortuitous operations of labor contractors. Some with migrant crews move over the state and take jobs away from local workers. Others specialize in picking up "floaters" and "skid-row" types. Other contractors, however, try to maintain stable local crews and also try to keep their workers employed as continuously as possible.

The present reduced labor demand permits the farm operator to be more selective as between labor contractors. It also enables both the growers and the contractors to be more selective in regard to workers. Positive steps can be taken to build up a stable local labor force, and labor contractors can be utilized to do most of the work of selection and training. Either they or the growers will need to establish methods of referring local workers back and forth, so as to keep them employed.

Mechanization has cut the length of the work year, and the seasonal work force is greatly underutilized. Seasonal workers averaged 101 days of work during the year 1961 as compared to 233 days for general farm workers. Their earnings were not large enough either to provide a good standard of living for them, or to provide much of an economic lift to the community. Their average earnings were $854 for the year as compared to $2,847 for general farm workers.

This situation has become unnecessary in an area where seasonality of work is being reduced so rapidly. The seasonal work is now spread between approximately 9,000 local workers and 6,000 migrants from other areas. Now 4,000 local workers leave the county after the cotton chopping and potato picking are over. Almost as many grape and melon workers move in as the others are leaving.

Underemployment is due to a large extent to prejudices of workers against doing certain kinds of farm work. Anglo workers usually refuse to do "stoop-labor" jobs in vegetables, sugar beets, and also in grapes. Use of the labor force cannot be efficient until either these attitudes are changed or other workers are recruited who will move readily from one seasonal job to another.

In the early months of 1962, 3,500 farm labor families were granted surplus commodities in order to help them to get through the slack season of the year. A work program that included learning skills for which there was a market would better meet their needs.

Developments in agriculture over the state provide some of the tools that will be useful in achieving a stabilized local labor supply. These include:

1. Increased activity by grower groups in recruiting and handling labor. They are learning how to select and train workers and to provide them with continuous employment.

2. Experimentation with crews specially trained to do all types of seasonal farm jobs in the local area.

3. The development of new crops and varieties that make smoothing out the work year more possible.

4. Diversification of crops and enterprises so as to keep expensive equipment from being idle.

5. Movement of new workers into the area who are willing to do all farm jobs.

These and other developments make a coordinated labor program and a stable labor force in Kern County a definite possibility. Some of the elements of such a program would be as follows:

1. Growers to arrive at an understanding with crew leaders in regard to the preferential hiring of local workers.

2. Growers to be more selective in regard to crew leaders and to deal with those who will train local workers in new farm operations, and maintain continuity of employment for them.

3. Local educational, agricultural, and publicity agencies to work to overcome work prejudices which produce underemployment.

4. Use of local housing and welfare programs to raise the level of workers and to acquaint them with new skills.